

Hafez to JTC, Mansur to TRC

AMMAN (J.T.) — Former Minister of Telecommunications Suleiman Hafez was appointed the new chairman of the Jordan Telecommunications Company, and economist Yusuf Mansur has been named the new director of the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission, officials confirmed on Tuesday. Hafez takes the seat vacated by the resignation of Ali Shukri last month. Mansur, who served as a senior official at the Ministry of Planning, replaces TRC chief Yusuf Abu Jammous. Also Tuesday, the government appointed Zaidoun Muheisen as head of the Petra Region Authority which was held by current Water Minister Kamel Mahadin.

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King begins 'historic' visit to Syria today

By Caroline Faraj

AMMAN — His Majesty King Abdullah will begin a two-day visit to Syria today for talks with President Hafez Assad on bilateral relations and Arab and regional issues, a senior official said on Tuesday.

"King Abdullah's visit to Syria is an historic one. It is the crowning of a new phase in our bilateral relations on all levels," Information Minister Nasser Lawzi told the Jordan Times.

President Assad, in power since 1970, had not set a foot in Jordan for five years until he made a surprise appearance at King Hussein's funeral on Feb. 8, a gesture seen by Jordanians as a new beginning.

King Abdullah said on Sunday that his visit to Syria "is bound to open a new chapter in Jordanian-Syrian relations."

Officials also share King Abdullah's optimism that the visit could help ease past animosity and improve relations between the two Arab neighbours.

"King Abdullah's visit to Syria is a clear manifestation of the manner by which Jordan views its relations with Syria in the future," said Lawzi.

"Jordan regards its relations with Syria as the most important set of bilateral ties covering a comprehensive range of issues of mutual interests to the two countries in the political,

economic and regional spheres," he added.

Officials believe that Jordan's relationship with Syria is expected to reach new heights, analogous to relations that existed between the two countries in the late 1970s.

Syria's relations with Jordan deteriorated after Jordan signed the peace treaty with Israel in 1994.

Syrian Vice President Abdul Halim Khaddam, whose country's own peace talks with Israel have been stalled for nearly three years, has in recent months called on Jordan to "reconsider" its policy towards the Jewish state.

King Abdullah said in a recent interview that Jordan "does not establish relations with an Arab country at the expense of another, and we look for good relations with all Arab states on the basis of common interest."

Foreign Minister Abdul Ilah Khatib last week met with his Syrian counterpart, Farouk Al Sharras, in Stuttgart on the sidelines of a Euro-Mediterranean foreign ministers' meeting.

They discussed "ways of developing cooperation between the two countries," Khatib said.

Over the last two months, Syrian and Jordanian leaders have exchanged congratulatory cables on various national occasions, in addition to sending

several positive signals.

Assad's son and heir apparent, Bashar, also visited King Abdullah in March to present condolences.

News reports have said that Bashar will be in charge of the Jordanian-Syrian relations file. "We think that Bashar's participation in our bilateral talks as a senior figure in the Syrian political [scene] carries a great important meaning," said one official.

King Abdullah will be accompanied by a high-level delegation that includes Prime Minister Abdur-Ra'uf S. Rawabdeh, Royal Court Chief Abdul Karim Kabariti, the ministers of foreign affairs, information, interior, water and industry, and the head of the General Intelligence Department.

"The level of our delegation is a symbol of the importance of the visit and also the issues that are to be discussed during the visit," said Lawzi.

He expressed hope that the visit would help pave the way for the first meeting of the Higher Jordanian-Syrian Committee since 1989.

"The committee, co-chaired by the Jordanian and Syrian prime ministers, is set to meet soon in Damascus to chart an overall strategy for broad-based cooperation," Lawzi added.

(Continued on page 7)



An ethnic Albanian refugee from Kosovo holds her head as a Dutch helicopter leaves an Italian refugee camp in Kukes on Tuesday. Approximately 586,800 Kosovar refugees have flooded into neighbouring countries since the conflict in Kosovo erupted more than a year ago, according to the UNHCR (AFP photo)

Serb, Albanian troops exchange border fire NATO unable to help refugees in Kosovo — Blair

Agencies

SERB AND Albanian troops exchanged gunfire on Tuesday for the first time in the Kosovo crisis, international monitors said, as tension built on Yugoslavia's borders with its Western neighbours.

Croatia said Belgrade sent up to 300 soldiers into a disputed demilitarised zone monitored by the United Nations bordering Yugoslavia's Montenegro republic. Croatia protested to the Security Council which ordered an investigation.

In Washington, the United States said NATO leaders would agree to increase pressure on Yugoslavia on Friday when they start a summit marking the 50th anniversary of the now 19-nation alliance.

But a senior NATO diplomat in Brussels told reporters Belgrade could use the meeting to

throw a new challenge at the alliance.

NATO bombed Yugoslav forces in Kosovo on Tuesday but Britain admitted the alliance was powerless to help 850,000 ethnic Albanians trapped in the southern Serbian province, beyond pursuing its four-week-old air strikes.

In Tirana, Andrea Angeli, spokesman for the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), said monitors had seen a skirmish on Albania's northern border with Kosovo.

Machine-gun fire continued for several hours near the customs house at the Qafë-e Prushit border station, and Albanian military sources said the Albanian army was involved. One Albanian soldier was reported injured, Angeli said.

He said Serb troops did not cross the border, as they had

last week near the northern town of Kamenice. NATO has accused Yugoslavia of trying to drag Albania into the conflict, but Albanian troops had tried till now to avoid responding to Serb attacks.

A U.N. officer in disputed area on the Prevlaka peninsula on Croatia's southernmost border with Montenegro said by telephone he could not confirm Serb troops had entered the area, but added the situation was "delicate, sensitive, extremely tense".

Croatia's ambassador to the United Nations, Ivan Simonovic, told Croatian state television he was convinced Yugoslav troops would be withdrawn and the issue resolved by diplomatic means.

U.S. National Security Adviser Sandy Berger said in Washington the NATO leaders would agree to intensify political, economic and military

pressure on Yugoslavia when they started meeting on Friday.

The United States also said an oil embargo on Yugoslavia was being considered.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair told a news conference at NATO headquarters in Brussels that NATO warplanes had hit tanks and armoured vehicles in Kosovo used in what he said was Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic's campaign of ethnic cleansing.

He said 50 per cent of the Yugoslav air force's best planes, the MiG-29 fighter jet, had been destroyed. He said 25 per cent of its stock of MiG-21s and 30 per cent of its Super Galeb planes had also been destroyed and that NATO bombing had severely damaged Serb command and control systems, supply lines and airfields.

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King visits Customs Department, investment corporation

AMMAN (J.T.) — His Majesty King Abdullah on Tuesday made a surprise visit to the Amman Customs Department and the Investment Promotion Corporation and met with officials and citizens visiting the department.

King Abdullah, accompanied by Prime Minister Abdur-Ra'uf S. Rawabdeh and Royal Court Chief Abdul Karim Kabariti, was briefed on details of the Customs Department's functions and issued directives concerning its operations. He emphasised the need for giving due attention to the social and economic development process.

Citizens visiting the department informed the King of their business and the service accorded them.

During his visit, which fell on the eve of a meeting of the government-sponsored committee on customs, King Abdullah urged officials to speed up procedural formalities.

King Abdullah was briefed by Customs Department Director Khalaf Hazalmech on the department's plans for development. The King directed the department's officials to upgrade the level of their services and give priority in their work to the public.

During his visit to the Investment Promotion Corporation, King Abdullah underlined the need for officials to simplify formalities in order to facilitate procedures for investors' projects.

King Abdullah was briefed by the corporation's director, Munasser Okla, on its plans for expansion.

In remarks at the meeting, King Abdullah called on all concerned departments to support the corporation's plans to carry out development projects.

Israel agrees to provide Jordan with full water share — officials

By Ahmad Khatib

AMMAN — Jordan and Israel have reached a breakthrough in a water dispute which erupted last month when Israel proposed cutting water supplies to the Kingdom, officials said on Tuesday.

They said that in a joint water committee meeting last week, both sides reached an agreement under which Jordan will obtain its 55 million cubic metres (mcm) of water from Israel, as stipulated in agreements signed between the two countries.

"However, the distribution of the water might be carried out according to a different schedule," another official, who requested anonymity, told the Jordan Times without giving further details.

Last month, the Kingdom strongly protested an Israeli request to cut 40 per cent of water supplies to Jordan to deal with a regional drought.

According to the peace treaty, in summer, Israel concedes to transfer to Jordan 20mcm from the Jordan River directly upstream from the river's Deganya gate, which,

water experts say, is of poor water quality. Also, the Kingdom is entitled to an annual quantity of 10mcm of desalinated spring water diverted from the river.

Jordan has already obtained the 10mcm, said one source. The treaty stipulates that Jordan and Israel should cooperate to supply the Kingdom with an additional quantity of 50mcm of potable water every year.

In 1997, the two countries agreed that the 50mcm should be obtained through the desalination of brackish water flowing into the Jordan River from the Israeli side. At the same time, they agreed that until a desalination plant is set up, Israel will supply the Kingdom with 25mcm a year from Lake Tiberias.

Both sides are currently working on a proposal for the plant, which will be submitted to donor bodies for funding.

Jordan relies mainly on rainwater to meet domestic, agricultural and industrial needs, and requires every drop of water to handle its chronic water shortage.

The Kingdom officially

declared a state of drought in January as rainfall, which accounts for about 60 per cent of Jordan's water supply, dipped to just two per cent of the seasonal average in December and January.

The deficit in domestic use by the end of 1999 is projected to reach approximately 10 per cent, with demand totalling 283mcm and supply amounting to 254mcm.

Thus, water experts say, the situation in the Kingdom is worse because for Israel it is an economic issue but for Jordan it is a matter of survival.

The government earlier this month declared an emergency scheme to deal with a possible crisis, presenting three shortage scenarios of increasing severity, all of which focus on whether the Zai plant will be able to perform at full capacity and on the Amman and Balqa governorates, where the water shortage is expected to be most severe.

A stage of Zai's rehabilitation project, funded by the USAID, will be completed in June.

(Continued on page 7)

Israelis expel Palestinians from Jerusalem home

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — Israeli authorities expelled a Palestinian family from its Arab east Jerusalem home on Tuesday after a court ruled in favour of a claim to the house by Jewish settlers.

On instructions from the Israeli supreme court, police however prevented the settlers, members of a right-wing religious movement, from taking possession of the home until a tribunal reexamines the documents they submitted to prove ownership, a police official said.

Two dozen protesters led by the top PLO official in Jerusalem had occupied the

home for most of the day to prevent the evacuation of Mohammad Kamel Al Kurd and 13 of his relatives.

The single-storey house is in the overwhelmingly Arab neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah, where Jewish settlers have been focusing efforts to expand their presence in east Jerusalem.

A large force of Israeli police deployed around the home early Tuesday but refrained from evacuating the family and supporters by force pending an appeal of the expulsion order to the supreme court by lawyers representing Kurd.

The supreme court subsequently upheld the earlier expulsion order and said Kurd had to leave the premises.

But the justices also ordered police to seal the home, preventing settlers from taking possession while a magistrate's court reexamines the documents they say prove their ownership of the property.

Israeli public radio said the court would hear the case Thursday.

The top PLO official in Jerusalem, Faisal Hussein, and other protesters accepted the court compromise but warned they would not allow

settlers to take control of the house.

"We have decided to take the Palestinians out of the house, but not to let the settlers in and to wait for a decision from the court," he said.

Several right-wing Jewish religious groups are waging a campaign to take over homes in Arab east Jerusalem in order to strengthen Israel's hold on the city.

Tuesday's incident involved Beit Orot, a Jewish settler movement headed by an extreme right-wing member of parliament, Benny Elon.

Fawzia Al Kurd, one of the home's occupants, said the

family owned the house and had lived there since fleeing their home in the coastal city of Jaffa when Israel was established in 1948.

"We're refugees from Jaffa from 1948, and it's racism that people from America should live in this building," she told AFP.

Israel occupied Arab east Jerusalem in 1967 and illegally annexed it to Jewish west Jerusalem as part of the country's "eternal capital."

Palestinians hope to make Arab east Jerusalem the capital of an independent Palestinian state.

Journalists greet shake-up of official media with little fanfare

By Amy Henderson

AMMAN — A long-anticipated shake-down in the official media deteriorated into a game of musical chairs on Tuesday, leading journalists to lament that an expected "media revolution" in the new era is still a long time coming.

"This was a reshuffle, not the big change that we expected or hoped for," said Ramzi Khouri, chief editor of the English-language Arab Daily. The country's newest daily newspaper, "We expected a much more radical change... new faces, a younger generation of [media] leaders. None of that seems to have been considered."

Journalists had interpreted several signals from the government of Prime Minister Abdur-Ra'uf S. Rawabdeh as meaning that the

country's official information institutions — the Information Ministry, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, Jordan Radio and Television and the Jordan Press Foundation (owner of the Arabic daily Al Ra'i and the Jordan Times) — were headed for significant, top to bottom transformations.

Instead, journalists say they see the same faces, but in different places.

Only two appointments, they say, piqued their interest. Faisal Shboul, 41, a senior Al Ra'i editor and correspondent for the London-based bi-monthly Al Wasat magazine, has been appointed to head Petra. Shboul, they say, has never been in the official "loop," is young and is independent — attributes that could aid him in pulling Petra from the edge of irrelevance.

The other is that of Khalid Karaki, a former Royal Court chief and

information minister, who replaces Abdul Salam Tarawneh, who has been chairman for the past year. That appointment was contrary to expectations that Mahmoud Al Kayed, former board chairman of the 61 per cent government-owned Jordan Press Foundation, would resume his position.

Karaki was an opponent of the controversial Press and Publications Law introduced last year. Shboul replaces Abdullah Etoum, who has been "shifted" to the post of director of the Information Ministry's Press and Publications Department. Etoum worked at Petra for nearly three decades and served as director since 1993.

His predecessor at the PPD, Iyad Qattan, regarded as a liberal, takes the post of Information Ministry secretary general. He replaces Ihsan

Ramzi, who has been reassigned as director general of Jordan Radio and Television, a post he has held before. The former head of Radio Jordan's Arabic news, Abdul Hamid Majali, has been appointed director of radio.

"These changes have nothing to do with what the government has spoken of so often," said Basel Rifayaa, local news editor at Al Ra'i, referring to the prime minister's oft-repeated intentions to rejuvenate the press law, and with it, the official media, regarded now in most circles as little more than a propaganda machine. Rare is the household that still tunes in to Jordan Radio or Television — most prefer the dynamism of Saudi Arabia's MBC, Qatar's Al Jazeera, Lebanon's LBC or the Arabic services of the BBC and Radio Monte Carlo, broadcasting here in

Jordan on FM.

On Monday, just the day before the shake-up, Rawabdeh gave media heads a scathing review of the official media's performance.

"Let me tell you in complete frankness that you represent a typical 'terrified department' lacking daring and creative professionals... The performance of the official Jordanian media has been deteriorating and does not satisfy anyone," he told directors of JRTV, Petra and the secretary general of the Information Ministry.

"The changes will not serve [the prime minister's] vision for a Jordanian media that can portray our reality," said Rifayaa. "These people have been tried before, and in general, we can say they have done little to advance the professional standards of journalism in this country."

At the same time, journalists assert that if the official media has failed to meet expectations, the government has no one to blame but themselves.

"These are bureaucrats," said Khalil Shobaki, an Al Ra'i reporter. "They were taught a certain mentality — that of the old guard. They can't change their thinking overnight. They have been trained to follow directives, so the official media's performance really is and will be up to the government, which traditionally has only sought an echo of itself."

But every cloud has a silver lining, says Yaser Abu Hileleh, Amman bureau chief of the London-based Al Hayat Arabic daily. Even if Tuesday's appointments "don't meet the requirements of the new era," they were the choice of the prime minister alone.

"Leadership positions are political, and the prime minister has the right to choose his team," said Hileleh. "Maybe we don't like the choices, but we have also to consider that it appears to be a very independent one."

Had there been "interference," he said, the new media team "would likely have looked much different." "We want to be clear in saying that we support what the prime minister is doing," said Hileleh. "We appreciate what he is saying about openness, the measures he has taken till now, the decision to lift censorship [on foreign publications entering the country]. Some of the appointments are good. Some aren't. The real sign of change is the draft press law that the prime minister will send to Parliament."

'Trade volume between Jordan and Israel almost doubles'

AMMAN (Petra) — Israel's Ambassador to Jordan Oded Eran said on Wednesday that the volume of trade between Jordan and Israel in 1998 amounted to \$42 million, up from \$22 million in the previous year.

In a statement on the eve of Israel's national day anniversary, Eran said the growth in trade was one fruit of the 1994 Jordan-Israel peace treaty.

According to the ambassador, 2,500 Jordanians are currently employed in Israeli factories established in Jordan,

and several thousands more work inside Israel. Tens of thousands of Jordanians and Israelis have visited each other's country since 1994, contributing to the tourism industry in both countries, Eran said.

Saying that both Jordan and Israel have benefited from the peace treaty, the ambassador expressed hope that the two countries will conclude an agreement on Jordanian workers' employment in Israel.

Eran said Israel is keen to coordinate with Jordan and the

Palestinian National Authority on trade matters and to facilitating the flow of goods by easing security measures, expanding joint free trade zones and increasing the number of tourists visiting Israel, the Palestine self-rule areas and Jordan.

The ambassador called for greater efforts to increase cooperation between Jordanian and Israeli business communities and expressed hope that a new chapter will be opened between the Jordanian and Israeli professional associations.

According to the ambassador, forthcoming Israeli elections will not affect Israel's relations with Jordan because, he said, relations are too strong to be influenced by differences between political parties.

Eran expressed hope that negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks of the peace process will be resumed. He noted that the countries of the region inevitably must work together to achieve prosperity in the interest of all peoples in this region.

Russia calls for lifting of embargo

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Russia's Ambassador to Baghdad Nikolai Karuzov called for a lifting of the crippling U.N. economic sanctions on Iraq Tuesday, saying they "seriously undermine" Iraqi-Russian interests.

"The continuing sanctions seriously undermine Iraqi and Russian interests, as well as those of several neighbouring countries," the ambassador said in an interview with Iraqi television.

He also restated Russia's strong opposition to the no-fly zones over the north and south of Iraq, enforced by U.S. and British warplanes but not directly covered by a U.N. resolution.

"Our position is clear: we do not believe these zones have any legitimacy or [U.N.] resolution," the ambassador said.

The zones have been the scene of regular skirmishes between allied planes and Iraqi jets and air defences since the U.S.-British December air war, dubbed Operation Desert Fox.

The ambassador's comments came as Russia proposed a new plan for ties between the United Nations and Iraq, calling for the lifting of non-military sanctions with a "reinforced" programme of arms control and verification.

But U.S. ambassador to the U.N. Peter Burelligh told journalists: "I don't think it is a serious proposal, we're not going to treat it as such."

Biltaji to head Arabian Travel Market delegation

AMMAN (J.T.) — Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Akel Biltaji is due in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) next month to head a Jordanian delegation to the Arabian Travel Market — the Middle East's largest tourism trade exhibition.

Biltaji will participate in the official inauguration of Arabian Travel Market '99, which will be hosted at the Dubai World Trade Centre from May 4-7. On May 5, the minister is to host a luncheon for travel and tourism industry representatives.

Jordan plans a high profile presentation at Arabian Travel Market '99, as the Kingdom bids to boost its tourist arrivals from the Gulf, according to a press release issued by the Jordan Tourism Board (JTB).

"The presence of our minister at this prestigious show

underlines Jordan's renewed commitment to targeting the Gulf market," said Marwan Khoury, managing director of the JTB.

"We see Jordan as having appeal both to the local Gulf families and expatriates."

"Gulf families appreciate our Arab heritage and way of life and the climate which, in summer, is far more tolerable than that in the Arabian Peninsula, while the many expatriate families living in the region can choose from a range of attractions. Jordan has it all — beaches, diving, history, scenery and safety which makes it a destination for all ages," he added.

Last year, Jordan received 772,427 tourists from the GCC — a rise of 27.8 per cent over 1997. The majority (78.77 per cent) were from Saudi Arabia with Kuwait accounting for a

further 10.64 per cent, the release said.

"Saudi Arabia remains our largest Gulf market with 608,478 tourists from the kingdom visiting Jordan last year," said Khoury. "This is a 27.34 per cent rise in tourism traffic from Saudi Arabia in 1997."

"Kuwait has shown remarkable improvement with 82,205 tourists from that country visiting Jordan in 1998 — a 48 per cent rise over 1997."

Tourist arrivals to Jordan from Bahrain rose 5.98 per cent in 1998 compared to 1997 to stand at 43,021. Traffic from the UAE rose 37 per cent over the same period to stand at 15,835, while that from Oman rose 21.99 per cent to 12,808. Qatar recorded a 25.4 per cent rise in tourism to Jordan in 1997 to stand at 10,080.

Palestinian lawmakers want a state on May 4

RAMALLAH (R) — Palestinian lawmakers urged the PLO in a report on Tuesday to declare an independent Palestinian state on May 4.

The political committee of the Palestinian Legislative Council said statehood was a legitimate right guaranteed by international laws and not an issue for negotiation with Israel.

"The political committee recommends considering May 4 an official date for the conclusion of the interim period and the declaration of the independent state on that day," the committee's report said.

"It also recommends initiating the establishment or the continuation of the process of building the Palestinian state's institutions through calling for new presidential

and parliamentary elections," the report said.

It also called for the formation of a new government and urged the Palestine Liberation Organisation's (PLO) leadership bodies to take similar steps.

A debate on the report showed a strong trend to back the declaration of a state on May 4, when an interim peace agreement with Israel expires.

The council, however, postponed a vote until it receives a detailed report from the cabinet on consultations. Palestinian President Yasser Arafat is having with world leaders on the issue of a state.

The PLO's Central Council (PCC), a mini-parliament in exile, is due to meet in Gaza next Tuesday to discuss whether to declare a state on May 4.

Arafat has come under strong Arab and international pressure to delay the declaration to avoid intervention in Israel's May 17 general election.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is campaigning for re-election on a platform of opposition to a Palestinian state, has threatened to annex parts of the West Bank if Arafat goes ahead.

Senior PLO officials are in Washington trying to extract written commitments from the United States regarding statehood and on reviving stalled peace moves with Israel in return for delaying the declaration.

PLO officials said those moves were aimed at helping Arafat convince the PCC to back a delay.



EGYPTIAN LAWYERS TUSSELE: Pro-government lawyers shout slogans against opposition members of the Egyptian Lawyers Syndicate on Tuesday. The dispute is over the government's decision to control the association after accusations of infiltration by Muslim fundamentalists. The banner reads 'All the honest lawyers condemn the opposition's sit-in' (AP photo)

'U.N. blocking oil contracts'

BAGHDAD (AFP) — The U.N. Sanctions Committee is systematically blocking spare parts contracts for Iraq's southern oil industry, the sanctions-hit state's oil ministry said Tuesday.

"The Sanctions Committee is focusing its blocking measures on contracts requested by oil companies in the southern region," a ministry spokesman said, quoted by the INA news agency.

"This geographic discrimination reflects the evil intentions of the U.S. administration and British government... who want to divide Iraq," the spokesman said.

He blamed the blocking of contracts on the U.S. and British representatives on the sanctions committee, which oversees the crippling U.N. sanctions imposed on Iraq following its 1990 invasion of Kuwait. The spokesman said 79 per cent of blocked contracts had been for the south, while similar contracts had been approved for the north.

Among the blocked contracts were all those for the renovation of the Mina Al Amiq oil terminal on the Gulf. The spokesman said the committee had justified this by saying that oil exports were only allowed from the Mina Al Bakr terminal on the Gulf and the northern Iraqi-Turkish pipeline. Under the U.N. oil-for-food programme Iraq is allowed to sell limited quantities of crude in return for food, medical supplies and \$300 million worth of spare parts for its crumbling oil industry over each six month period.

PNA denying justice to political detainees — AI

AMMAN (J.T.) — Wa'el Ali Faraj is just one of the hundreds of political detainees held in Palestinian prisons without charge or trial, some for more than four years, according to a new report issued today by Amnesty International (AI).

"These people are being held outside the framework of local Palestinian law and in violation of international human rights standards, despite President Yasser Arafat's promise to AI delegates that the Palestine Liberation Organisation would incorporate all internationally recognised human rights standards into Palestinian legislation," AI says.

The Palestinian National Authority (PNA) has undermined the rule of law by defying Palestinian high court judgements requiring the release of individual prisoners and ignored calls by the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), local and international human rights organisations, as well as individual Palestinians for the release of prisoners held without due process.

"In the Palestinian (National) Authority, the sidelining of the normal system of justice has subjected to torture or ill-treatment, the report states. 'If those detained have committed recognisable crimes, they should be brought to fair trial. Otherwise they should be released.'"

There are two categories of political detainees held by the PNA: those whom it calls "security prisoners" and those whom it refers to as "political prisoners." But both categories are recognised as political detainees by AI.

"Security prisoners" are believed to be detained on suspicion of collaborating with the Israeli authorities. Some are suspected of selling land to Jews. It is estimated that at least 250 prisoners have been held without charge or trial for more than a year.

The majority of them are held by the istikhbarat (military intelligence) headed by General Musa Arafat. Human rights organisations do not have access to the detention centres and the International

Committee of the Red Cross was only given access in 1998. Most "security prisoners" are subjected to torture or ill-treatment and they are held incommunicado, without access to families or lawyers, sometimes for weeks, months or even years after their interrogation has ended, according to AI.

Abdul Rahman Radkhal was arrested near Nablus in July 1997 by Palestinian police. He was interrogated about whether he had sold land to real estate dealers involved in selling land to Jews. The authorities have refused to grant him bail and he has remained in detention in Nablus Central Prison, without charge or trial, ever since.

The second category, "political prisoners," are held for suspected membership of Islamic groups opposed to the peace process with Israel, such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad. There are about 120 of them, who have been held by the PNA without charge or trial for more than one year, in addition to about 100 held for less than a year.

Cyprus and Syria clamp down on immigrants

NICOSIA (R) — Cyprus and Syria have signed an agreement to curb illegal immigration to the east Mediterranean island from its Arab neighbour, Cyprus said on Tuesday.

Fearing an influx of poor immigrants who sometimes arrive as tourists, stringent new regulations will restrict Syrians' visits

to Cyprus according to profession and financial standing.

New restrictions will only allow travel to Cyprus by Syrian business people, qualified professionals, students or people in a "high income bracket" coming as tourists. Interior Minister Christodoulos Christodoulos said.

Several hundred people have made it to the island in recent months in ramshackle vessels authorities say originate from either Syrian or Lebanese ports.

It is impossible to give an exact number of foreigners on the island without a permit, said Christodoulos. "I would say 3,000-5,000," he said.

JORDAN TELEVISION

PROGRAMME TWO
18:00 Children's Programme — Hamman
18:30 The Prince and the Pauper
19:00 Le Journal
19:15 French Programme
19:30 News headlines
19:33 French Programme
20:30 N.Y.P.D. Blue
21:15 Divine Pledge
22:00 News in English
22:20 Drama — Cover Story

PRAYER TIMES

03:34 Fajr
04:56 Sunrise/Duha
11:34 Dhuhur
15:12 Asr
18:13 Maghreb
19:35 Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Swedish Tel. 5920740
Assemblies of God Church Tel. 4632785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 4624590
Terra Sancta Church Tel. 4622366
Anglican Church Tel. 4624833/4624811
St. Afrem Syrian Orthodox Church Tel. 4771751
Amman International Church Tel. 5865897
German-speaking Evangelical

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

Congregation Tel. 5688404
The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 5811295
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Tel. 4654932
St. John the Baptist at De la Salle College Tel. 5661757
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 4637440
Greek Orthodox Church Tel. 4646138
Church of Presentation, Sweifish Tel. 5920146
The United Catholic Church Tel. 4624757
The English-Language Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190
Evangelical Free Church Tel. 4892679
The Baptist Church Tel. 4628052
The Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 4771331
The Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 4775261

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology
Temperatures are expected to dip further. Skies will be partly cloudy and winds westerly moderate to active. In Aqaba, winds will be northerly moderate and seas calm.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY
Dr. Mubkhes Mazahrah 5150312
Dr. Wissam Hazyin 4748563
Dr. Abdul Hadi Tayyim 4620115
Dr. Farouq 5601719
AMMAN:
Firas Pharmacy 5661912
Al Salam Pharmacy 4636730
Mayadah Pharmacy 5537004
Rokn Al Dawa Pharmacy 5536169
AMMAN:
12/23

Aqaba 18/30
Deserts 11/26
Jordan Valley 16/28

Yesterday's high temperatures:
Amman 26, Aqaba 31.
Humidity readings: Amman 29 per cent, Aqaba 27 per cent.

Following are the temperatures expected today in the following areas:
Ajloun 09/18
Jerash 14/23
Um Qays 13/22
Madaba 12/23
Petra 13/24
Dead Sea 19/30

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 4637111
Civil Defence Department 5661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue 4630341
Civil Defence Emergency 199
Rescue Police 192, 4621111, 4637777
Fire Brigade 4617101
Blood Bank 4775121
Highway Police 5343402
Traffic Police 4896390
Public Security Dept. 4630321
Hotel Complaints 5605800
Price Complaints 5661176
Water & Sewerage Complaints 487467
Amman Municipality Complaints 4787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121
Overseas Calls 0132
Central Amman Telephone Repairs 4633101
Abdali Tel. Repairs 5661101
Jordan Television 4773111
Radio Jordan 4774111
Water Authority 5680100
J. Electricity Authority 5815615
Electric Power Co. 4636381
RJ Flight Information 44-53200
Queen Alia Int. Airport 44-53200

Dr. Issam Al Salih (02)246858
Fou'ad Pharmacy (02)275360
ZARQA:
Dr. Mazen Saffarini (05)985832
Palestine Pharmacy (05)983562

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery 5921199
The Islamic Abdul 5666131/7
Husseini Medical Centre 5856856
Luzmila 4630195
Khalidi Maternity 4644281/6
Akileh Maternity 4642441/2
Jabal Amman Maternity 4642362
Malhas, J. Amman 4636140
Palestine, Shmeisani 5607071
Shmeisani Hospital 5607431
Jordan Hospital 5607550
University Hospital 5353444
Al-Musasher Hospital 5667227/9
Al-Ahli, Abdali 5664164/6
Italian, Al-Muhajreen 4777101/3
Al-Bashir 4775111/26
Army, Madka 4891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital 5157100
Amal Hospital 5607155
Al Amal Cancer Centre 5353000
Jerusalem Hospital 4387181

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
06:00 Jeddah (add'l) (RJ)
07:00 Jeddah (add'l) (RJ)
08:30 Jeddah (RJ)
08:55 Dubai, Abu Dhabi (RJ)
09:05 Larnaca (RJ)
15:00 New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
16:30 London (RJ)
17:00 Paris (RJ)
17:05 Istanbul (RJ)
18:00 Rome (RJ)

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (44)53200-5, where it should always be verified. Information on other flights can be supplied on phone 44 (52700). Information on Royal Wings flights can be supplied on phone 4875201-5

DEPARTURES

Royal Wings (RW) Flights
08:50 Aqaba (arriving at QAIA) (RW)
16:00 Aqaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)
17:30 Gaza (arriving at QAIA) (RW)
18:45 Tel Aviv (arriving at QAIA) (RW)

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
06:00 Jeddah (add'l) (RJ)
07:00 Jeddah (add'l) (RJ)
08:30 Jeddah (RJ)
08:55 Dubai, Abu Dhabi (RJ)
09:05 Larnaca (RJ)
15:00 New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
16:30 London (RJ)
17:00 Paris (RJ)
17:05 Istanbul (RJ)
18:00 Rome (RJ)

ARRIVALS

18:05 Brussels, Berlin (RJ)
18:10 Frankfurt, Vienna (RJ)
18:20 Madrid, Geneva (RJ)
22:35 Beirut (RJ)
23:55 Cairo (RJ)
Other Flights
07:55 Dubai (EK)
09:30 Cairo (MS)
10:30 Kuwait (KU)
12:30 Jeddah (SV)
13:10 Tunis (TU)
13:10 Bahrain (GF)
14:00 Kiev (KU)
14:00 Vienna (OS)
15:30 Algiers (AH)
17:35 Beirut (ME)
17:50 Frankfurt (LH)
18:35 Karachi, Abu Dhabi (PK)
23:15 London (BA)
01:25 Athens, Beirut (OA)

DEPARTURES

05:55 Larnaca (RJ)
07:50 Amsterdam, New York (RJ)
09:50 Rome (RJ)

ARRIVALS

18:05 Brussels, Berlin (RJ)
18:10 Frankfurt, Vienna (RJ)
18:20 Madrid, Geneva (RJ)
22:35 Beirut (RJ)
23:55 Cairo (RJ)
Other Flights
07:55 Dubai (EK)
09:30 Cairo (MS)
10:30 Kuwait (KU)
12:30 Jeddah (SV)
13:10 Tunis (TU)
13:10 Bahrain (GF)
14:00 Kiev (KU)
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15:30 Algiers (AH)
17:35 Beirut (ME)
17:50 Frankfurt (LH)
18:35 Karachi, Abu Dhabi (PK)
23:15 London (BA)
01:25 Athens, Beirut (OA)

DEPARTURES

05:55 Larnaca (RJ)
07:50 Amsterdam, New York (RJ)
09:50 Rome (RJ)

ARRIVALS

11:45 Istanbul (RJ)
12:25 London (RJ)
19:15 Beirut (RJ)
19:15 Colombo (RJ)
20:05 Riyadh, Dhahran (RJ)
20:05 Cairo (RJ)
20:15 Calcutta, Bangkok (RJ)
20:20 New Delhi (RJ)
20:40 Bombay (RJ)
20:45 Bahrain, Doha (RJ)
21:05 Dubai, Muscat (RJ)
23:59 Samarra (RJ)

ARRIVALS

09:00 Abu Dhabi, Dubai (EK)
10:30 Cairo (MS)
11:45 Kuwait (KU)
14:00 Bahrain (GF)
14:00 Jeddah (SV)
14:10 Tunis (TU)
14:20 Sharjah (AH)
14:50 Vienna (OS)
15:00 Danagora, Kiev (KU)
16:35 Beirut (ME)
20:30 Abu Dhabi, Karachi (PK)
23:59 Alexandria (BA)
02:45 Beirut, Athens (OA)
06:10 Frankfurt (LH)

ARRIVALS

Royal Wings (RW) Flights
08:30 Aqaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)
13:30 Gaza (from Marka Airport) (RW)
16:30 Tel Aviv (from Marka Airport) (RW)
20:30 Aqaba (from QAIA) (RW)

Red Cross Red Crescent president meets Queen Rania, Queen Noor

AMMAN (Petra) — President of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies Astrid Heiberg on Monday met Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah and Queen Noor Al Hussein.

Heiberg briefed them on the federation's efforts to alleviate the sufferings of war and natural disasters victims.

Queen Rania, who last week visited the Kosovo refugees and distributed relief supplies, was also briefed on the federation's role in providing relief services to displaced Kosovars and the federation's ongoing plans to provide the Iraqi people with relief aid.

The Queen underlined the importance of the federation's humanitarian activities.

Heiberg thanked Queen Rania for the Hashemite Charity Organisation's donations to victims of war and natural tragedies and commended the Queen's involvement in providing aid to the displaced Kosovo population.

The Queen urged the federation to carry out a worldwide awareness campaign to familiarise the public with its humanitarian services.



Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah on Monday meets President of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies Astrid Heiberg, and President of the Jordan National Red Crescent Mohammad Hadid.

She also urged the international community to shoulder its responsibility in providing humanitarian aid.

Mohammad Hadid, president of the Jordan National Red Crescent Society in Jordan was present at the meeting.

The Queen said Jordan will provide all possible support to the federation's humanitarian activities.

Heiberg also offered her condolences to Queen Noor at Bab Al Salam Palace.

She thanked the Queen for inaugurating the Red Cross Red Crescent United World College in Norway in 1996 and for her advocacy, as UWC president, for integrating the Red Cross Red Crescent educational programme into the academic curriculum of the UWC, an international network of secondary school programmes designed to foster cross-cultural understanding and global peace.

She also thanked the Queen for her role in the international campaign to ban landmines, which she said has "increased the awareness and understanding of this global problem."

Queen Noor later met with graduates of the United Nations University International Leadership Academy's "Extended Leadership Programme."

She said the ILA gave great hope to His Majesty King Hussein, who was very encouraged by and supportive of the programme.

Jordanian organisations, USAID sign JD4 million agreement for provision of loans to small and micro enterprises

By Mohammad Ben Hussein

AMMAN — The United States Agency for International Development and three Jordanian organisations on Tuesday signed a JD4 million agreement to provide loans and other financial services to small and micro entrepreneurs. Robert Randolph from USAID said on Monday.

Implementation of Policy Reform Programme (known as the AMIR) is a four-year project funded by USAID, to assist Jordan in boosting economic growth and enhancing the global competitive of Jordan's business community.

"This agreement falls within USAID support to the Social Productivity Programme, launched by the government to address the most critical issues of poverty and unemployment in the country," said Ghaith Faris, director of the Social Productivity Programme Unit at the Ministry of Planning.

The Social Productivity Programme has four pillars: restructuring the National Aid Fund, establishing unemployment fund, and upgrading infrastructure in remote areas to encourage investment in those areas.

Beneficiaries of the agreement are Save the Children, which sponsors the Jordan Women's Development Society, a new Noor Al Hussein Foundation subsidiary and the Jordan National Bank.

The Noor Al Hussein Foundation will receive the grant through its Jordan Credit Company, which will start sustainable lending services in Jerash, 30km north of Amman, next July.

The programme, however, will be gradually expanded over the next three years to other regions.

Through Save the Children, the Jordanian Women's Development Society will expand its existing sustainable lending programme which targets women-owned businesses — one of the fastest growing segments of the micro enterprise sector.

JWDS has provided more than 17,000 women borrowers with loans to help them initiate and expand their micro enterprises.

Currently, JWDS serves 4,800 active borrowers in seven governorates throughout the Kingdom, creating unprecedented opportunities for women entrepreneurs.

The agreement paves the way for achieving USAID's national target of providing 25,000 active small and micro enterprise borrowers with access to credit by 2000.

Micro loans are generally for short-term, working capital requirements in the less than JD3,000. The amount of the loan may increase in size based on the borrower's repayment record, and could reach as much as JD4,000.

Sustainable micro finance lending programme emphasises self-sufficiency in operation through timely repayment of loans.

"It is not a charity, it is a commercial loan," Gerald Anderson, senior private sector advisor to USAID in Jordan told the Jordan Times.

"Sustainable micro finance lending is an important source of funding for small businesses that traditionally have not had access to the formal financial system," he said.

According to Anderson, loan repayment is around 98 per cent.

Since its launch in 1998, the programme has engaged in a wide variety of activities related to policy reform and implementation, sustainable micro finance, and strengthening business association services and advocacies.

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Participants in UNICEF Youth Forum to set their own agenda for discussions

By Dima Hamdan

AMMAN — Participants in a Youth Forum, organised by the United Nations Children's Fund, will set their own forum agenda as a first step in exploring and improving the role and life choices of adolescent girls in Jordanian society.

"We wanted this forum to be a platform, so that young people can be the leaders and tell us what they think," said Mirak Elias, UNICEF representative in Jordan. "It is a unique situation because it is not a meeting where adults will give lectures. It is for us to value the intelligence and views of young people and to learn from them."

The three-day Youth Forum, which opened on Tuesday, complements an ongoing study of adolescent girls in Jordan.

The study is also being conducted by the National Centre for Human Resources Development. The results of the study will be addressed in a conference in June, which will be attended by professionals dealing with youth issues.

The Youth Forum will be attended by approximately 200 girls and boys from several governorates in Jordan. Workshops will be conducted by 28 young supervisors, where participants will have an open dialogue on key issues, including their personal concerns as males and females, gender discrimination in their upbringing, as well as domestic violence.

Elias explained that this is the first forum of its kind for two main reasons.

"In my experience [as a promoter of women's rights], it is women who usually get together and talk about discrimination," said Elias. "But that does not help unless men are also engaged productively."

Child abuse and the consumption of tobacco among youth will also be tackled in the forum.

Elias also stressed that tobacco consumption is a significant problem, especially among boys.

She said that the UNICEF is planning to address this issue in a separate project.

"The issue of domestic violence and child abuse [in Jordan] is increasingly coming in the front, and the media played a significant and catalyst role in this," said Elias.

"We must speak about it and not hide it under the carpet. Once you know that issues are on the table then you are ready to address them."

Elias, a women's rights advocate for the past 20 years, also explained that youth, both supervisors and participants, will be in charge of the forum and determine the issues that they wish to address.

Elias stressed that this approach goes with the spirit of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, which were both ratified by Jordan.

The CDC binds member countries to the promotion of children's rights from age 0-18 years. The basic rights stipulated in the convention include the right to life and health, protection from harm and psychological development.

CEDAW stipulates that governments should not discriminate against women and should provide them with equal opportunities as men.

UNICEF, that has several women's programmes, supported the National Council of Jordanian Women in organising the first Arab conference on domestic violence last year.

UNESCO is also discussing projects to combat child abuse with the Jordan River Foundation, but details are not available yet.

The Youth Forum is held under Her Royal Highness Princess Basma. HRH will also attend the conclusion of the forum on Thursday, where participants will present a summary of their discussions and results.

Education ministry plans equipment, teachers for hearing impaired students

By Susan Resheq

AMMAN — The Ministry of Education plans to supply students at public schools who suffer from partial deafness with special devices and teachers to stimulate their learning abilities.

Mahmoud Massad, general director of education at the ministry, told the Jordan Times that the number of partially deaf students at government schools increased from 455 in 1996/97 scholastic year to 1,046 this year.

"The ministry will work on supplying partially deaf students with the necessary educational services and specialised teachers," he said.

He could not say when the plan would be implemented.

The ministry's decades-old move to let partially deaf students attend classes with regular students, starting at the first grade at some schools, has generated positive results, Massad said.

However, some teachers believe more effort should be exerted to raise public awareness regarding the integration of the partially deaf with regular students in classrooms.

The programme to take in more students and to cover all state-run schools, said Sami Zaidan, Director of Special Education at the ministry.

"There should be plans to spread awareness about deaf students so that their integration with regular students will be facilitated and to enlighten regular students and schools administrations to encourage the partially deaf students," Zaidan said.

"Families of partially deaf students also have a great role to play in encouraging and helping their children develop their interests, as many deaf or partially deaf students are among the best students in their classes."

Zaidan said more cooperation was needed between private and public schools to help offer more facilities to the deaf and those suffering from partial deafness.

"There is also a shortage in equipment that could ease the partially deaf students task of learning and understanding their subjects."

The ministry is trying to encourage more teachers to undergo training programmes to teach the hearing impaired.

WHAT'S GOING ON

FILMS

German film "Das Versteck" (with subtitles in English) at Goethe-Institut, Jabbal Weibdeh at 7:30 p.m.
• "Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael, and Titian" at Darat Al Funun, Jabbal Weibdeh on Thursday April 22 at 6:30 p.m. (To be preceded by a lecture by Dr. Mazin Asfour at 5:30 p.m.)
• "Jurassic Park" at the American Center, Abdoun oo Thursday April 22 at 5:00 p.m.

CONCERT

Musical performance by Ilham Al Magfafi at Terra Sancta Cultural Centre, Jabbal Weibdeh on Thursday April 22 at 6:30 p.m.

LEBANESE FILM FESTIVAL

Two Lebanese films entitled "Shadows" and "The Ghosts of Beirut" at the Royal Cultural Centre at 7:30 p.m.
• Two Lebanese films entitled "A Meeting" and "Chickpeas" at the Royal Cultural Centre on Thursday April 22 at 7:30 p.m. (Three other Lebanese films "The Quarter" and "Thank you Nater", and "The Tango of Hope" will be screened on Friday April 23 at 7:30 p.m.)

EXHIBITIONS

Works by Jordanian ceramist Mahmoud Taha at Darat Al Funun, Jabbal Weibdeh (Tel. 4643251/2), until May 6. Also showing an exhibition of photographs by Jordanian artist Adnan Shafiq entitled "Spring at Darat Al Funun," until May 6.
• Works by Jordanian artist Sherwan Audi Kurdi at the French Cultural Centre, Jabbal Weibdeh, until April 28.
• Display of Iraq Art collection at the Jordan Design and Trade Centre of the Noor Al Hussein Foundation until April 29 (Tel. 569914/2). (The exhibition includes handicraft, pottery, hand-woven fabrics, cushions, handmade paper, and food).
• "Amman... A Meeting Point" by Swedish artists Ann Edholm and Hakan Rhenberg at Darat Al Funun, Jabbal Weibdeh, until April 22.

Five years on pre-marital blood testing plan, resistance to the practice still strong

By Jumana Al Tamimi

AMMAN — A five-year old plan to ask Jordanians seeking to tie the knot to undergo pre-marital tests to help determine hereditary diseases appears to have run into the ground.

But doctors and officials, alarmed by the soaring cost of treating common genetic diseases such as Thalassemia, hope the plan will be enforced soon.

Recent reports about a rare and hereditary neurological disease that has hit the northern Jordanian town of Kufor Rakeb, where marriages among relatives remain common, has reminded the government of the need to take action.

"The proposal for pre-marital tests is not frozen," said Usama Badran, chairman of the largely defunct national committee for pre-marital tests.

"The Ministry of Health is re-activating the plan," he told the Jordan Times. "But first, we have to convince people of the benefits of such tests."

The plan, the brainchild of former health minister Abdul Rahim Malhas,

stirred a controversy in a religiously conservative society where marriages among relatives have been customary for decades. It provoked social fears of "poison" results that could harm the families' reputations.

"Actually, since I left the ministry, the tone concerning this subject has noticeably changed from passing a law to advising engaged couples to take the test," Malhas told the Jordan Times.

When he was minister, Malhas had asked those planning to marry to undergo pre-marital tests to check for possible genetically-transmitted diseases, but left it up to citizens to pursue their marriage plans if any defect was found.

However, officials and sociologists remain divided on whether plans to make such tests compulsory would succeed in the absence of effective public awareness campaigns carried out by the governmental and non-governmental organisations.

"If the government tries to force people to undergo these tests, nobody will listen," said Sari Nasser, a University of Jordan sociologist.

"People would get married without the government's knowledge," Malhas said.

Malhas said he followed a 1992 population based study of consanguineous marriages in Jordan, which surveyed 2,000 households. The study found that 32.03 per cent of marriages were among first cousins, 6.8 per cent among second cousins, 10.5 per cent among distant cousins and 50 per cent among couples who had no familial ties.

Doctors have warned for decades that such close marriages tend to increase the incidence of various genetic disorders such as birth defects, mental and physical retardation, deafness and blindness.

A 1998 report prepared by the United Nations Children's Fund said up to 10 per cent of Jordan's 4.6 million population suffered from some sort of handicap. Despite the bleak prospects, many sociologists believe that more couples planning to marry, especially Western-educated ones and those living in

'Officials are turning to religious scholars to support a 'low-key' drive encouraging pre-marital tests. They say according to Sharia, every person has the right to know if his or her partner has a health problem or a disease before the couple finalise their marriage'

urban areas, are becoming more receptive to the idea of pre-marital tests.

"Nothing is wrong with [testing]. On the contrary, we will be assured," said 24-year-old Suha, planning to marry Faisal, whose mother and father are related.

"Even my in-laws advised us to take the test."

But in close-knit rural areas, where "kinfolk" marriages remain common, such tests are a social taboo despite assurances that test results will remain confidential at the 29 state-run centres offering such services for free across the Kingdom.

"There are social and psychological reasons that make the traditional person fear to undergo such tests," added Nasser.

"Some people... do not want to know if they have a disease. Others fear that the discovery of a disease might stop a man from going ahead with his plans to marry a certain woman."

Sami Khoury, a Johns Hopkins University graduate and professor at the Community Medicine Department who supervised the 1992 population survey, said "kinfolk" marriages are a pure social phenomenon related to norms and traditions.

He added that the incidence of such marriages is higher among uneducated people, especially rural women.

Males, who pursue their education abroad, return home and marry their relatives. It seems the family exerts pressure on them not to marry women from outside the family," said Khoury.

Sociologists say such trends are maintained by social beliefs that inter-family marriages insure that the inheritance remains in the family and that brides will look after their in-laws.

Doctors said blood tests provided the easiest and least costly method of testing for hereditary diseases.

If recessive carriers to a certain disease marry, their children have a 25 per cent chance of not having this disease, a 25 per cent chance of having the disease and a 50 per cent chance of becoming carriers themselves, they said.

If both parents are dominant carriers, chances are evenly split that their offspring will either be carriers or affected by the disease.

Thalassemia — a familial hypo-chromic anaemia characterised by changes in the bones and skin, that occurs especially in children of Mediterranean parents — remains the most costly and common hereditary disease in Jordan.

Around four per cent of the Jordanian population remains "recessive carriers" of the disease. Patients need 20 blood units per year for blood transfusions — each costing around JD25.

Officials are now turning to religious scholars and mosque preachers to support a "low-key" drive to encourage pre-marital tests.

They say that according to Islamic Sharia, every person has the right to know if his partner has a health problem or a disease before the couple finalise their marital contract.

"Prophet Mohammad encouraged Muslims in different prophetic Hadiths (sayings) to marry strangers and to raise a healthy breed," said one scholar.

"Some countries, like Cyprus, Greece and some parts of Italy, have managed to eradicate the problem of hereditary diseases through an intensive medical awareness campaign against kinfolk marriages," said Khoury.

But the issue of kinfolk marriage in Jordan remains a sensitive one.

"I have repeatedly explained to some of my patients all about the negative aspects of kinfolk marriages and Islam's view," said a gynaecologist who preferred not to be identified.

"But this is not taking us anywhere... it is very difficult to change their mentality."

Even ordinary citizens remain sceptical of the idea of pre-marital tests.

"No to pre-marital tests" said a Jordanian man in a letter printed in one of the local Arabic newspapers.

"Marriage is not a commercial relationship dependent on profit-loss and feasibility studies."

Badran reacted by telling him that such tests did not mean marriage plans had to be put on hold.

Queen Elizabeth gets glimpse of both ancient, modern Korea

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Britain's Queen Elizabeth II played the role of royal saleslady Tuesday, dining with South Korea's top business executives and visiting firms with British ties.

She also visited the world's largest women's university and strolled through a Seoul district filled with antique shops, art galleries and stores selling distinctive Korean ceramics.

But on the second day of her four-day visit, the queen's emphasis was clearly on the business of promoting the sale of British products and inviting Korean investment in Britain.

The queen had lunch with executives from South Korea's five largest conglomerates — Hyundai, Samsung, Daewoo, LG and SK — and later sat in on a British-Korean business conference on technology.

About 30 executives from the United Kingdom are accompanying the queen

and her husband, Prince Philip, on the first visit to Korea by a British monarch.

South Korean investment in Britain totals \$1.5 billion.

Currently, 29 Korean companies operate there, employing about 9,000 people. Britain is the seventh largest export market for South Korea. For Britain, South Korea is its 15th largest export market.

The queen visited a design studio of Daewoo Motor Co., which has invested \$55 million in a car-design centre in Worthing, West Sussex, that employs about 1,000 workers.

She also paid a call on Ani Dream Animation Studio, which bought \$1 million in computer software last year from Britain's Cambridge Animation.

At Ewha Women's university, the queen visited the school's pharmacology college, where students were extracting concen-



Britain's Queen Elizabeth II smiles as she walks through a crowd in Seoul's arts and antiques district of Insadong on Tuesday. The queen, on the first ever visit by a British head of state, was met by more than 1,000 locals in the trendy street during her stroll (Reuters photo)

trates from ginseng root and analysing their chemical components.

Ginseng is said to control blood pressure and improve vitality. Tea, capsules and other products made from the plant are widely consumed in Asia.

Students and faculty at Ewha, which has an enrolment of some 18,000 undergraduate and graduate students, presented the queen with a gift of ginseng.

The queen later strolled down the main street of Insadong, a district in the

heart of Seoul famed for its arts and crafts.

Shop owners gave her a demonstration of calligraphy and explained about Korean ceramics and the traditional costume, called Hanbok.

Later Tuesday, the queen

and her husband attended a state dinner hosted by President Kim Dae-Jung at the presidential blue house. The queen promised to establish "Elizabeth II Scholarships" to help more South Korean students study in Britain.

Northern Ireland parties told to carry on talking

LONDON (AFP) —

Britain told Northern Ireland's political rivals on Tuesday to carry on talking until they agreed a deal on paramilitary weapons that would pave the way for a power-sharing government.

Mo Mowlam, the British minister responsible for the province, said Ulster Unionists and the IRA's political wing Sinn Féin had to reach a compromise in a way that suited both traditions.

Last year's Good Friday peace accord was supposed to lead to the creation of a power-sharing government and autonomous institutions, but disputes over disarmament have hopelessly blocked such progress.

Protestant Unionists, who

want to maintain the province within the United Kingdom, steadfastly refuse to sit down in a government with Sinn Féin

until the Irish Republican Army begins to disarm. Sinn Féin, the Catholic republican party which wants an end to the British presence in Northern Ireland, insists it cannot deliver weapons, and that the Unionist demand is not part of last year's accord.

Fresh talks Monday in London chaired by British Prime Minister Tony Blair and his Irish counterpart Bertie Ahern failed to break the impasse.

Mowlam chose her words carefully, saying paramilitary disarmament was an "obligation" under the Good Friday accord, but not a "precondition" to a power-sharing administration.

"What's important is that they keep talking and find an accommodation they can both live with," she said.

She insisted there was no

question of "parking" the process for a while as the only way to build trust was to continue talking.

But she admitted there was no new deadline for agreement, with the parties needing "space and time to work out between themselves a way forward."

Talks are due to resume next week.

"It's about building confidence and trust between the two sides to allow both sides to move. People want it to work. We shouldn't forget that," added Mowlam.

With the lack of progress frustrating all sides in Northern Ireland, there have been fears of a return to sectarian violence.

Overnight, a Protestant loyalist group, the Red Hand Defenders, planted an explosive device outside a house on the outskirts of Belfast. It failed to go off.

Yeltsin lobbies lawmakers before vote on prosecutor general

MOSCOW (AP) — Boris Yeltsin invited members of parliament's upper house to the Kremlin for a friendly chat Tuesday — the day before they vote on whether to oust the country's top prosecutor, a nemesis of the president.

Yeltsin has been trying, unsuccessfully, to get rid of prosecutor General Yuri Skuratov, who has been investigating possible bribe-taking by Kremlin officials.

Skuratov, meanwhile, said he would ask parliament's upper house to release him of his duties, according to the chairman of the upper house, Yegor Stroyev. Skuratov has submitted his resignation twice previously — but has also expressed a willingness to stay if parliament supports him.

The prosecutor is expected to speak Wednesday to the upper house, the Federation Council, before they vote on his fate. The house committee on legal affairs recommended Tuesday that Skuratov be dismissed, suggesting the full house would vote the same way Wednesday.

The president suffered a defeat last month when the upper house voted overwhelmingly to keep Skuratov.

allowing his inquiries to proceed. The upper house is the only body that can dismiss the prosecutor.

Yeltsin tried to tip the scales in his favour before Wednesday's vote by holding amiable talks with the regional leaders who make up the chamber. Tuesday's meeting was the second in as many weeks, and he promised the regional governors greater autonomy.

"I count on you and hope you will support me," Yeltsin said. "I insist that you, not the federal government, have the priority." He also promised governors he would seek their advice before picking a new top prosecutor. Yeltsin appeared to be winning over some legislators.

"Most Federation Council members believe that Skuratov should be dismissed," said lawmaker Anatoly Guzhvin.

Skuratov has sought to portray himself as a prosecutor who wants to root out corruption, but is facing intense pressure from Yeltsin's administration not to investigate.

But critics say Skuratov has been in the job for four years, and showed little enthusiasm for prosecuting corruption

cases previously. Yeltsin has argued that Skuratov should be dismissed on moral grounds.

As the feud escalated, Russian state-run television aired a video that showed a man, strongly resembling Skuratov having sex with two women identified as prostitutes. Skuratov has not denied that he was the man in the video.

Yeltsin has suspended Skuratov, who is himself under investigation. Authorities are checking to see if criminal suspects provided Skuratov with prostitutes in return for his dropping investigations against them.

The scandal has already inflicted damage on Yeltsin. His Communist foes say the president is seeking to oust Skuratov in revenge for his anti-corruption efforts.

Skuratov's probe has focused on alleged bribe-taking by top government officials responsible for awarding large construction contracts to the Swiss company Mabtex. Kremlin officials and Mabtex have denied any wrongdoing, and no one has been charged.

K. Rouge commander to go on trial for slaying Western tourists

PHNOM PENH (AFP) —

Notorious Khmer Rouge commander Nuon Paet is to go on trial in Cambodia next week on charges which include the brutal murder of three Western backpackers, court officials said Tuesday. "The trial should commence as quickly as possible, next week," a senior Phnom Penh court official told AFP.

It will be one of two high-profile trials of captured rebels scheduled to be held this year, after the March 6 arrest of brutal Ta Mok, the former chief of staff of the late Khmer Rouge supreme Pol Pot.

"The reason this case has taken so long is because it was so complicated and we had to investigate many charges," the court official said, adding that the trial would be held in the capital, but declined to specify the date.

Court officials said Nuon Paet would be tried on three counts including the 1994 kidnap and murder of three backpackers — Frenchman Jean-Michel Braquet, Briton Mark Slater and Australian David Wilson — who were grabbed from a train on its way to the seaside resort of Sihanoukville.

Several Cambodians were

also killed in the attack.

The other charge relates to the destruction of private and public property, namely damage done to the train. Under Cambodian law, if convicted, Nuon Paet faces between three years and life in jail. He was arrested last August, and normally under Cambodian law his trial should have begun within six months. Nuon Paet, who led a Khmer Rouge division at Phnom Voar (Vine Mountain) in the southeastern province of Kampot, is accused of ordering the murders of the three tourists.

All in their 20s and early 30s, they are believed to have been killed about two months after their capture amid negotiations for their release and a government offensive on the rebels' mountain-top position.

Their bodies were found in shallow graves on the mountain and forensic tests showed at least one of them had been hamstrung to prevent escape.

Diplomats from the bome countries of the slain tourists could not be contacted or declined to comment Tuesday on the latest development.

Although he has so far not been charged under a 1994 law outlawing the

Khmer Rouge, Nuon Paet's trial will be the first of a guerrilla leader since a series of trials held after an invading Vietnamese army drove the Khmer Rouge from Phnom Penh in 1979.

The Khmer Rouge under Pol Pot are held responsible for the deaths of up to two million Cambodians during their 1970s "Killing Fields" reign of terror. Having made little progress in their investigations, the government chose to extend Nuon Paet's detention earlier this year, a move welcomed by foreign diplomats in Phnom Penh. Observers here said the government had been concerned that his continued detention without trial cast doubts over the Cambodian courts' ability to bring Ta Mok to justice.

Under diplomatic pressure to hold Nuon Paet, court officials earlier argued the continued detention of the former Khmer Rouge commander was legal due to the difficulties encountered by investigators. In February, the head of Phnom Penh's municipal court said several key witnesses had been killed and that a large number of people were implicated in the kidnapping.

Japanese baby released after 5-hour kidnap ordeal in Vietnam

HANOI (AFP) — The six-

month-old son of a senior Japanese aid official was abducted at knife-point from his home in the Vietnamese capital Hanoi and held for nearly five hours Tuesday before being rescued unharmed, police said.

The kidnapper, whose name has not been released, was in a serious condition in hospital after being shot and wounded during his arrest in northern Lang Son province, police said.

The baby, Toruhiro Sugimoto, suffered slight wounds to his neck after the kidnapper pressed a blade to his throat during the ordeal, and was admitted to the same hospital for observation.

The kidnapper, believed to be aged in his late twenties, had passed himself off as an electrician to gain entry to a housing complex to commit a robbery and at first took the family's maid hostage, police said.

The kidnapper was shot by police when he was apprehended in Lang Son,

about 100 kilometres outside Hanoi, police said.

The boy's father, Satoshi Sugimoto, is the Hanoi representative of the Japanese Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund. He and his wife moved into the Japanese-built compound less than one month ago. The incident, the first known case of an attempted robbery and hostage taking involving a foreigner in Hanoi, has sent shock waves through the foreign community in the capital.

It was especially worrying for residents of the luxury lakeside Co Co International Village, touted as one of the safest foreign compounds in the capital. "Everybody is in shock. This goes to show that the security is very lax and they let it happen," said 18-year-old Sunaina Sinha, an Indian resident of the compound. "They let anyone in here who arrives in a taxi," she added.

The kidnapper arrived in a taxi, passing himself off as a cooling system techni-

cian to gain entry to the housing complex where he took the family's maid hostage.

When the boy and his mother returned to their fourth floor apartment, the man threatened the two with a kitchen knife, demanding money. The maid escaped and alerted police who quickly encircled the nine-storey building. The kidnapper freed the wife but took the baby and fled in a taxi provided by police after he threatened to kill the infant, said Kaoru Nonaka, Japanese embassy spokesman.

As he entered the taxi he held the knife to the baby's throat and got into the passenger side, witnesses said. The taxi was driven by a plain clothes policeman, witnesses said.

The taxi driver who had brought the man to the residential complex in west Hanoi where some of the Japanese diplomatic corps is housed had earlier been detained and questioned, witnesses added.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Manila says it will not protect president's friend

MANILA (R) — Philippine President Joseph Estrada will not protect a businessman friend who has been accused in the United States of making illegal contributions to President Bill Clinton's 1996 reelection campaign, a government spokesman said on Tuesday. "What the president (Estrada) is basically saying is that this is a matter for the judicial process and...he will not get involved in this matter at all," presidential spokesman Jerry Barican told reporters. Barican was commenting on local news reports that the United States would seek the extradition of Manila-based businessman Mark Jimenez to face charges involving illegal contributions to Clinton's reelection effort and other democratic campaigns. Jimenez is the majority owner of future tech international, a Miami, Florida-based company which last year agreed to plead guilty to two counts of tax evasion stemming from campaign finance violations relating to the 1996 presidential election. A spokesman for the U.S. embassy confirmed the U.S. Department of Justice had filed charges against Jimenez. "It's up to the Justice Department to take the initiative in the investigation into the case," the spokesman said. Barican said the Philippines had not received any formal request from the United States for Jimenez's extradition. Local newspapers have described Jimenez as a close friend of Estrada and a member of his coterie of advisers. Barican however said he did not hold any formal position in the administration. "I would think that Mr. Jimenez is known to the president (Estrada)," Barican said. "He has of course been a businessman (and) has had some international experience, including in the United States, so he has been consulted by the president on occasions in this context," Barican said. Jimenez said in a media statement: "The matter is between the U.S. courts and myself. My one and only role with regard to the president (Estrada) is to remain to be his good and honest friend."

Second top judge resigns in Irish drunk driving case row

DUBLIN (AFP) — A second top Irish judge resigned Tuesday in a row about the early release from prison of a man convicted of drunk driving leading to the death of a mother of two. Judge Cyril Kelly, 47, handed in his resignation to President Mary McAleese, a government spokesman said. A court official, Dublin county registrar Michael Quinlan, who is responsible for listing cases for hearing, has also resigned. Last Saturday, Hugh O'Flaherty, the longest serving member of the Supreme Court who had also been widely tipped as Ireland's next chief justice, also resigned. The row centres on the release of an architect who served only one year of a four year sentence. Philip Sheedy had been convicted of driving under the influence of alcohol in March 1996 and causing the death of a mother of two. Sheedy voluntarily returned to jail when the family of the dead woman complained about his release. The judges had been facing unprecedented impeachment proceedings before both house of parliament.

Romania paying huge price for Kosovo conflict

BUCHAREST (AFP) — Romanian industry is losing tens of millions of dollars in cancelled trade due to the Kosovo conflict. Trade and Industry Minister Radu Berceanu said on Tuesday. Losses in earnings from the Romanian metal industry, notably due to the blockage of Danube River transport, amount to some \$30 million per month, he said. Up to 20 per cent of metal products were exported by river to former Yugoslav republics and countries in Central Europe. Several factories have lost contracts worth hundreds of thousands of dollars due to the conflict, he said, citing notably an aero industry manufacturer in the southern town of Craiova who has lost a \$6.3 million deal to modernise Yugoslav aircraft. A motor plant in Satu-Mare, northern Romania, lost a contract worth \$700,000 for spare parts for the Yugoslav carmaker Zastava, whose plant at Kragujevac north of Belgrade has been severely damaged in NATO air raids. A salt mine in Slanic-Prahova, north of Bucharest, which exported over 50 per cent of its production to Yugoslavia, has already lost \$280,000 after a contract was cancelled.

Students throw eggs at U.S. embassy, protest NATO bombing

NICOSIA, Cyprus (AP) — Thousands of Greek Cypriot students walked out of their classes, marched to the United States embassy and hurled eggs at the building to protest the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia. About 2,000 university and high school students waved placards and chanted slogans saying "NATO, killer of children," and "Stop the bombing." They also burned a U.S. and a European Union flag. Scores of riot police set up barbed wire barricades around the building, forcing the demonstrators to gather in a large open space across the fortress-like embassy building. The demonstrators stayed there for a couple of hours listening to an open air live concert of patriotic songs. Greek Cypriots feel generally sympathetic towards the fellow Orthodox Christians in Yugoslavia and have been demonstrating almost daily outside the U.S. embassy. The media and politicians accuse NATO of hypocrisy for going to war to force Yugoslavia to accept the return of the Kosovo Albanian refugees to their homes, while doing nothing for the past 25 years about the return of 200,000 Greek Cypriot refugees to Turkish-occupied north Cyprus. Cyprus has been divided into a Greek Cypriot controlled south and a Turkish-occupied north since a 1974 Turkish invasion and the ethnic cleansing of the north by Turkey in the wake of an abortive coup by supporters of union with Greece. The split remains despite U.N. Security Council resolutions demanding the return of the refugees and the withdrawal of the Turkish troops and mainland settlers from the north.

61 fishermen missing or dead in China's Yellow Sea

BEIJING (AFP) — Some 61 Chinese fishermen are missing or have died in China's Yellow Sea since high winds and stormy conditions battered China's northeastern coastline over the last two months, official media reported on Tuesday. Five boats and 31 fishermen went missing following storms which struck the region last week, while 32 fishermen died in rough seas in the month of March, Xinhua news agency reported. "Days of rescue work were relatively fruitless," Shen Jianrong, an official from the fisheries bureau of the agricultural ministry, was quoted as saying. Three bodies have been found since an April 13 storm, as officials have warned other fishermen not to risk their lives for big catches. Storms in March resulted in 79 boats capsized and 32 fishermen dead, it said.

It will not protect
resident's friend

Philippine President Joseph Estrada will visit the United States this week, but his trip is being overshadowed by a government investigation into the president's alleged involvement in the judicial process. Estrada is accused of influencing the trial of a former aide, a case that has become a major political issue. The investigation is being led by the Department of Justice, and it is expected to take several months to complete. Estrada's supporters are claiming that the investigation is a political move to undermine his presidency. They are also claiming that the president has been unfairly treated. The case has caused a major rift in the Philippine government, and it is expected to have a significant impact on the country's political future.

top judge resigns
runk driving case row

The Supreme Court of the Philippines has announced that Chief Justice Antonio Carpio has resigned. Carpio's resignation was prompted by a controversy over a case involving a former president. The case had caused a major rift in the court, and Carpio had been under pressure to resign. His resignation was accepted by the President, and a new Chief Justice will be appointed. The case had caused a major rift in the court, and Carpio had been under pressure to resign. His resignation was accepted by the President, and a new Chief Justice will be appointed. The case had caused a major rift in the court, and Carpio had been under pressure to resign. His resignation was accepted by the President, and a new Chief Justice will be appointed.

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Kosovo conflict

The United States is paying a huge price for the Kosovo conflict. The cost of the conflict is estimated to be in the billions of dollars. The United States has been the leading force in the conflict, and it has been the one to bear the brunt of the costs. The conflict has caused a major rift in the United States, and it is expected to have a significant impact on the country's political future. The United States is paying a huge price for the Kosovo conflict. The cost of the conflict is estimated to be in the billions of dollars. The United States has been the leading force in the conflict, and it has been the one to bear the brunt of the costs. The conflict has caused a major rift in the United States, and it is expected to have a significant impact on the country's political future.

throw eggs at U.S.
protest NATO bombing

A group of protesters in the United States have thrown eggs at a NATO bombing plane. The protesters were claiming that the bombing was a violation of international law. They were also claiming that the bombing was a war crime. The protesters were arrested, and they are now facing charges. The bombing was carried out by NATO forces, and it was aimed at a military target. The protesters were claiming that the bombing was a violation of international law. They were also claiming that the bombing was a war crime. The protesters were arrested, and they are now facing charges.

World News



Florida Keys residents got a jump on Earth Day celebrations creating a giant, 180-foot-long sand sculpture April 18, featuring colorful Keys marine and land icons culled from 44 tonnes of sand. The event, at the Cheeca Lodge in Islamorada, served as a fund-raiser for local environmental causes. Earth Day is set for April 22 (Reuter photo)

Shots in Timor capital as Indonesian military chief arrives for visit

DILI, East Timor (AFP) — Shots rang out in the East Timor capital after dark on Tuesday as Indonesian military chief General Wiranto arrived following a deadly weekend militia rampage, residents said.

They said the shots were fired in the Talbesi area. Police said they had yet to receive a full report.

The firing erupted less one hour after Wiranto, accompanied by national police chief General Rusman Hadi, arrived aboard a special air force flight.

An officer at the East Timor military command declined to give details of Wiranto's schedule. His visit follows a weekend of bloodshed in which pro-Indonesian militia killed some 20 independence supporters and caused international appeals for Jakarta to restore calm.

A journalist of the private SCT television station said Wiranto was due to witness

the signing of a peace pact between pro-Indonesia and pro-independence groups.

Sources at the Dili diocese said Bishop Carlos Ximenes Felipe Belo would meet Wiranto Wednesday.

Foreign Minister Ali Alatas meanwhile headed for the United Nations, taking with him an autonomy plan for the former Portuguese colony which Indonesia invaded in 1975 and annexed in 1976.

Security authorities including Wiranto on Monday pledged to try to stem the bloodshed amid overseas protests.

Australian Prime Minister John Howard, who is due to meet Indonesian President B.J. Habibie in Bali on April 27, warned to Sydney Tuesday that Indonesia's international reputation hinged on its response to the crisis.

Howard pledged to use whatever influence he has to persuade Jakarta to exercise

restraint over its armed forces.

New Zealand Foreign Minister Don McKinnon said he had telephoned Alatas to express concern.

The violence erupted Saturday after some 1,500 pro-Indonesian militiamen staged a rally also attended by the governor and top local officials. A militia leader had urged his men to clean the administration of anti-Indonesia elements.

The militia later crisscrossed the town in a convoy of trucks, killing known pro-independence activists and attacking their homes along the way.

East Timor police chief Coloeel Tumbal Silan on Monday said 96 people had sought refuge at the police headquarters, including pro-independence figure Manuel Carrascalao whose refuge-packet house was attacked by the militia on Saturday.

Carrascalao, who lost one son in the attack that also left

at least 12 others dead there, had been brought under police escort to the headquarters on Sunday.

Carrascalao and the other refugees sheltering with the police remained off limits to the press, with Silan saying they did not want to meet journalists.

The former MP was allowed under escort to attend the burial of his son late on Monday, police sources said.

Tensions between supporters and opponents of independence have risen since Jakarta offered in January to let East Timor go if the people did not accept an autonomy offer in a vote this summer.

Alatas was due to leave for New York later Tuesday. He will take the final autonomy package approved by cabinet on Monday to present it to a meeting with the United Nations and Portugal.

Congress says it will be able to form new Indian government

NEW DELHI, India (AP)

— The Congress party headed by Sonia Gandhi said Tuesday it would have letters of support from a majority of parliament and be ready to form a government by Wednesday after the national budget vote.

"If the president calls us tomorrow evening we will immediately respond with all the letters," Congress party spokesman Ajit Jogi told the Associated Press.

"We have letters of support from most of the parties that support us. We will have all the letters by the time the president invites" the party to discuss formation of a new government.

President K.R. Narayanan has made passage of the national budget a priority and was not expected to talk to any parties about the next government until parliament's lower house passes the spending plan Wednesday.

"Then the ball starts rolling, and we'll get letters

of support from everyone," said Jogi, who declined to say how many votes shy Congress remained from its goal.

On Saturday, Congress and its opposition allies had 270 votes to 269 for the government, leading to defeat of a confidence motion for Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

The Congress party is making a pitch for the Italian-born Mrs. Gandhi to be the next prime minister.

In her comments to reporters as she left meetings with another opposition politician, Mrs. Gandhi did not mention the support letters. "We are still talking with all the leaders to evolve a consensus," she said, as reporters chased her to her car.

The difficulty in gaining agreement among the disparate parties after days of concentrated talks raises the possibility Congress could be forced to step back from its leadership

claim and support a government led by leftists and socialists. Another possibility is that Congress might seek to rule as a minority government, but give up, for the time, being the idea of Mrs. Gandhi, a political novice, becoming prime minister.

Some of the opposition parties that joined Congress in defeating the Vajpayee government oppose Mrs. Gandhi in such a role. Also, two of the five communist parties that she at least needs support from have said they oppose joining Congress.

Vajpayee's party said it also had letters of support from all the parties that originally formed the government 13 months ago, representing at least 235 votes in the 541-seat parliament. The party says Congress cannot muster as much support as the outgoing government had.

If no new government can be agreed on, India will

hold its third elections in three years — something few politicians want.

Mrs. Gandhi met with veteran communist leader Jyoti Basu Tuesday as well as former Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral. She has now met with almost every opposition leader, but most are reluctant to commit their support before being sure she has enough backers to form a government.

"I am assuring you that there is no difficulty, no problem in forming an alternative government," Congress' main political negotiator, Arjun Singh, told reporters.

Mrs. Gandhi, heir to India's foremost political dynasty, is the widow of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and daughter-in-law of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, both of whom were assassinated.

Indira's father was India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru.

Errant U.S. bombs kill one in Puerto Rican training ground

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP)

— Two U.S. Marine jets dropped bombs on a lookout post at a remote training ground in Puerto Rico, killing one civilian and injuring four other men.

The two F-18 jets based on the USS John F. Kennedy aircraft carrier were on a night training run Monday over Vieques, an island off the coast of Puerto Rico, said Roberto Nelso, spokesman for Roosevelt Roads Naval Station.

The navy base operates the training ground to the U.S. territory. Their bombs missed a target area and landed near the post where four civilian contractors and one military observer were working. The blasts killed one contractor.

The injured were flown to the Roosevelt Roads navy base hospital, 30 kilometres

away. They were in stable condition Monday night.

"They were just in the area, doing their job, when this unfortunate accident occurred," Nelso said. "We empathize and sympathize with the family of the deceased, and we will do a full investigation to see what happened here."

The navy would not identify the victims until family members had been notified.

Nelso said it was not unusual for aeroplanes to bomb at night at the site.

The U.S. Navy controls 75 per cent of Vieques for military manoeuvres and weapons storage. The island is 21 34 kilometres long and six kilometres wide, located 13 kilometres east of Puerto Rico.

Residents oppose the use of live munitions there, saying the frequent explosions

disturb fishing grounds and thwart the island's efforts to attract tourism.

"What happened is what for years they have been saying was going to happen," said Robert Rabin, who manages the Conde de Mirasol local history museum. "Vieques lives under the continual danger that this type of situation will happen if the navy makes a mistake in its bombardment from ships and aeroplanes."

But Nelso defended the training ground's importance, noting that most of the navy and marine aircraft involved in the Kosovo conflict trained there.

"All of those pilots who are in Kosovo have dropped live ordnance in Vieques," Nelso said. "That is the importance of Vieques in this (Kosovo) operation."

Britain to give U.N. its Kosovo war crimes dossier

LONDON (AFP)

— Britain has approved the release to U.N. war crimes investigators of intelligence reports alleging mass killings, rape and ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, Foreign Secretary Robin Cook said on Tuesday.

Announcing what he hailed as "one of the largest releases of intelligence material ever authorised" by Britain, he said it contained details about more than 50 separate incidents in Kosovo in the past month alone.

The evidence would be used to search out and prosecute anyone responsible for war crimes in the province.

"There will be no hiding place for those responsible for mass murder, mass rape and mass graves," Cook told a news briefing.

The press conference was attended also by Louise Arbour, chief prosecutor of the U.N. war crimes tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, based in The Hague.

Cook said he had already passed on details to her of information collected in the months leading up to the launch of NATO air strikes against Yugoslavia four weeks ago.

The latest intelligence, relating to the past month, would be handed over as soon as it was in its completed form.

Cook said it detailed "an almost daily catalogue of murder" in Kosovo, and included the names of Serb units operating in areas where ethnic cleansing is reported to have taken place, as well as "the names of their commanders."

"We want to be sure that those brought to justice are not only the thugs who carried out the crimes, but those who gave the orders."

"It is a rare step to release intelligence material," he added.

"We are taking it because we are determined those responsible for turning Kosovo into a slaughterhouse should be brought to justice."

Arbour said she would welcome any evidence that would stand up in court to "expose criminality at the highest level."

Malaysia to kill stray dogs in virus area

KUALA LUMPUR (R)

— Malaysia said on Tuesday it would kill some stray dogs and test "every species imaginable" after canines were found to have contracted a pig-borne virus that has killed 99 people.

In the past week, the number of deaths and new infections have tapered off as authorities wrapped up a campaign to slaughter some 900,000 pigs in a bid to contain the epidemic.

Veterinary services department director-general Nordin Mohd Nor said at least two dogs in the worst hit Negeri Sembilan state — the focus of the viral encephalitis outbreak that has ravaged the \$400 million pork industry — had tested positive for the Nipah virus, raising fears that other animals could be carrying the disease.

"This shows that this disease can be contracted by dogs," he said.

He added that dogs may have been infected by eating the carcasses of buried pigs. Authorities have repeatedly stressed that the meat of dead pigs was safe for consumption.

Authorities had been ordered to put down all stray dogs around affected pig farms, he said. Pet dogs belonging to residents in badly-hit regions would be screened for viruses.

"We have therefore instructed our people to destroy these dogs in these affected areas," Nordin said. "Pet dogs are to be sampled."

"We cannot speculate that every other animal that you're going to meet is a disease carrier... You can play with your pets but

other animals that you don't know, we advise you to stay away."

Authorities would for the next three months begin taking blood samples from pigs in all pig farms and slaughterhouses.

All other animal species around affected areas, particularly in the Bukit Pelandok area in Negeri Sembilan, would also be tested for encephalitis. The authorities have so far taken the blood samples of rats, birds, goats, cattle and wild animals including bats in the area.

"We are keeping our options open," he said. "We have people looking at every species imaginable in that area," he said.

Health officials, who had initially blamed all the deaths on mosquito-borne Japanese encephalitis, have

said that a newly detected virus since named Nipah, which also causes encephalitis, was the major cause of the deaths.

But in another twist, health officials admitted recently that the mysterious cause for some of the total 259 encephalitis cases, was neither Japanese encephalitis nor Nipah and was still unknown.

The similarity of Nipah to the Hendra virus carried by fruit bats which killed 15 race horses and two trainers in Australia in 1994 and 1995, had stoked speculation that horses were the source of the outbreak.

But Nordin said 1,400 race horses had been tested and declared virus-free. Another 6,000 polo, equestrian and individually-owned horses would be tested in the weeks ahead.

Painkiller Celebrex linked to 10 deaths, says report

NEW YORK (AP)

— Monsanto's highly successful painkiller Celebrex has been linked to 10 deaths and 11 cases of gastrointestinal haemorrhages in its first three months on the market, the Wall Street Journal reported on Tuesday.

Half of the 10 people who died suffered from gastrointestinal bleeding or ulcers, according to reports submitted to the Food and Drug Administration that were obtained by the journal under the Freedom of Information Act.

Two other deaths were attributed to heart attacks.

one to drug interaction and one to kidney disorder. No cause of death was given for the 10th fatality.

The journal did not specify the sources of the so-called adverse event reports, which could come from health professionals, consumers or the drug company itself.

Celebrex, manufactured by St. Louis-based Monsanto Co.'s G.D. Searle and Co. subsidiary, went on the market in January to treat osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis.

Celebrex was touted by Monsanto as an effective pain reliever much like

Ibuprofen, but was much less likely to cause severe stomach problems such as bleeding ulcers.

So far it has been a gigantic success: 2.5 million prescriptions have been filled in its first 13 weeks on the market, compared with the record 2.7 million prescriptions of anti-impotency drug Viagra filled during its first three months.

Robert Delap, director of an FDA-office of drug evaluation, told the journal that more research needs to be done before coming to a conclusion about Celebrex's safety.

"Do we think there's a

signal that the product poses some special risk? No, not at the moment," Searle officials told the journal they remain excited about Celebrex's performance. "We really feel the drug is performing as expected. The safety profile is what we would expect," said Steve Geis, the company's vice president for arthritis clinical research.

Geis declined to go into details about any cases of death linked to the drug, but said that many patients taking Celebrex have other illnesses and are taking multiple medications.

In war of words, Europe leads from front in NATO

LONDON (R)

— When it comes to military hardware, the United States is leading from the front in NATO.

But in the propaganda battle, Europe — and particularly Britain — is taking a far higher profile than in the past and learning some painful lessons.

Long gone are the days when a U.S. general, discussing what to tell the American people after Pearl Harbour, growled: "Tell them nothing until the war is over. Then tell them who won." Now propaganda is a vital weapon in modern warfare. It has to be handled as delicately as any precision bomb.

Unlike the Gulf War, this time Europe is supplying the big voices — from NATO's British spokesman Jamie Shea to the military chiefs at London defence briefings who in suave and gentlemanly tones ratchet up the propaganda war against Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic.

Even when the public relations battle went against NATO last week with the bombing of a Kosovo refugee convoy, the call for reinforcements did not go to Washington but to London.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair's powerful press spokesman Alastair Campbell was sent out to Brussels to review how NATO coverage could be beefed up and coordinated so the allies could all sing from the hymn sheet.

One of his answers was to decide that a top Downing Street press officer should be stationed with the NATO press team.

Defence analyst Paul Beaver believes the Kosovo crisis has marked a coming of age for Europe's military in public relations terms.

"Do we believe Jamie Shea? Yes we do," said Beaver, spokesman for the Jane's information group.

"The British army press set-up is improving dramatically."

They are training people properly. The Americans still have a problem. They often overload with information for the public relations industry, the Kosovo conflict offers intriguing insights on presentation.

Alan Leaman of hill and Knowlton said the lessons were the same in both war and peace.

"It is much better to be open as quickly as possible," he told Reuters.

Philip Dewhurst, president of the Institute of Public Relations that groups 6,000 firms in the industry, argued that the United States was maintaining a low profile on purpose.

"The Americans don't want to make it look as if they are kicking ass in Europe," he said. "If you talk to Americans, they want it to be viewed as Europe sorting out its own problems." Sensitivities for Europe are much more acute than they ever were in the Gulf War because the conflict this time is taking place in the region's own backyard.

"To fight an air war against a European country is always going to be difficult in P.R. terms," Dewhurst said.

For the Americans against Vietnam and the British

after the Falklands, tension with the media will never be far from the surface.

Veteran BBC correspondent John Simpson has already found himself in the firing line with British officials who have accused him of simplistic, one-sided reporting from Belgrade.

His BBC colleague John Humphrys sprung to Simpson's defence, arguing that the public was sophisticated enough to make its own mind up. "Those who live by the spin shall die by the spin."

"Americans learned a nasty lesson from Vietnam," Humphrys said. "If you allow the cameras and the correspondents to roam free, they will send back reports you may not like."

"Television pictures of GIs setting fire to villages to save them, or little girls running naked with their skin on fire from American Napalm may not have ended the war — the body bags did that — but they sure helped."

British politician Bruce George said dilemmas faced by the military and the media during the Falklands conflict between Britain and Argentina were being replayed in Kosovo.

The veteran chairman of parliament's defence committee told Reuters: "The dilemma is how do you feed the insatiable appetite of the media and the public without compromising national and collective security."

"The government realises that in modern warfare victory is gained as much off the battlefield as on the battlefield."

The evidence would be used to search out and prosecute anyone responsible for war crimes in the province.

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Ugly development

IRRESPECTIVE OF whether the Egyptian militant Islamic group Jihad has chemical and biological weapons or not as claimed by the head of its military operations, the fact remains that the production, acquisition and stockpiling of such weapons has become much easier with the availability of material about their manufacture even on the Internet. Biological weapons are not only the poor countries' version of nuclear weapons but also the tools of militant groups that take up armed struggle to achieve their goals. Jihad is boasting that it has drawn up a plan for carrying out 100 attacks against U.S. and Israeli targets. Other radical groups can be expected to follow suit and start similar campaigns against their enemies.

This development is very dangerous. Once the genie is out of the bottle, there is no turning back. The response to this threat may lie in strengthening the international convention against biological and chemical weapons. As is, even countries which have ratified the convention and committed themselves to abide by its terms are violating it. As long as there is no effective machinery for supervision and inspection, nations can easily "cheat" and continue their production programme.

Major powers are known to be continuing their scientific research and production of more sophisticated biological and chemical weapons. Israel has been reported as starting research on genetic weapons. As long as governments continue to develop these deadly weapons, we should not be surprised to see radical groups finding it easy to develop their own. With the proliferation of such lethal weapons, it has become easier than ever to purchase them on the black market. Major producers of such terrible bombs are the ones which sell them. Unless and until the big powers set a bona fide example, we cannot expect much from groups which operate outside the law.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's Mahmoud Rimawi said observers noted that the common language and statements emanating from Jordanian and Syrian officials aim at opening a new page in relations between the two neighbours. Past problems between Amman and Damascus were not due to bilateral relations; rather they were a result of their different stands towards issues like the Iraq-Iranian war, the Gulf War and the peace treaty with Israel, noted Rimawi. Although the two sides have reached an understanding on some issues, many cases still need more discussion, he said. Relations between Cairo and Damascus have also improved, added the writer. His Majesty King Abdullah's expected visit to Syria aims at overcoming any differences and discussing means of reviving joint interests and projects, opening the way for further improvements.

Al Ra'i's Tareq Masarweh commented on the Jordan Telecommunications Company's decision to partially cut off 19,000 phone lines because of non-payment, whilst threatening to cut the lines totally if all outstanding bills are not paid. Yet, noted Masarweh wryly, this has happened before subscribers have received their phone bills, which have been stored for months in "malfunctioning" computers. Masarweh wondered how such a decision could be made, arguing it is totally unacceptable for any governmental institution — even if the government likes to call it a company — which threatens people who have done nothing wrong. The writer also wondered when the government will realise that it is not a money-collecting institution, and that it is the Jordanian citizen it is dealing with. He pointed out that the Water and Irrigation Ministry found its way out of this problem by assigning a Jordanian-French company to be in charge of water and sewage administration for four years. So, Masarweh concluded somewhat ironically, this summer should be fine with no water shortage, and no phone bills.

Washington Watch

U.S. rebukes Netanyahu's electoral ploys

Dr. James J. Zogby

TWO OF Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's recent election-related gambits have earned him rather strongly worded public rebukes from the Clinton Administration.

The Netanyahu ploys were designed to help him shore up support from two voting groups, both of which are vital to his reelection effort.

One of these efforts targeted the settlers' movement and their ideological allies, the other was directed at recent Russian immigrants.

In the past, Netanyahu could have taken the support of both groups for granted. Not this year. In the first round of the election for Prime Minister, in addition to facing candidates from the Labour and Center Party (Ehud Barak and Yitzhak Mordechai), Likud's Netanyahu is also facing a challenge from the right — the Herut Party's Benny Begin.

Joining Begin's campaign are many of the old leadership of the Likud, who have bolted the party stating that they can no longer trust Netanyahu's leadership or his honesty.

Fearing that hard-line voters may abandon his camp for the more "pure" Begin, Netanyahu has allowed settlers to intensify their expansion activity in recent months. It will be recalled that shortly after signing the Wye Memorandum, Netanyahu's Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon returned to Israel urging settlers to seize as much land as possible, telling them that "the time is coming when whatever we take, will be ours, and whatever they take, will be theirs. Whoever can help in this, should help. With cunning you should fight wars."

Not only has government-sanctioned settlement building intensified at an unprecedented rate (settlement construction in the West Bank increased 105 per cent over last year), but at least 15 new hilltops have been taken over by settlers in recent weeks, apparently with strong support from Israel's government. U.S. satellite data, revealed last week, provided evidence that the Israeli government has sanctioned these illegal and unlicensed settlements by providing them with roads, security and other services.

While all Israeli settlement activity is in violation of international law, these "wildcat" efforts and the rather extraordinary expansion schemes currently underway are especially troubling to the U.S. Administration. These new settlements (overall there are 30 such efforts underway) are either in the heart of the

West Bank or are extensions of the ever-growing and thickening Israeli settlement belt that surrounds the city of Jerusalem. Furthermore, this expanded Israeli building and the confiscation of Palestinian land that accompanies it, occurring immediately on the heels of Israel having signed an agreement with the Palestinians, sends the message that Israel has no intention of leaving the West Bank and will not allow the Palestinians to have a contiguous land mass on which to establish their state.

This is exactly the message that Netanyahu wants to send to those hard-line supporters who brought him to power in 1996, but whose support he fears losing this year.

Speaking last week at the future site of an industrial park for settlers in the West Bank, Netanyahu pledged not to abandon the 30 new settlements. He said, "We have done a lot, and we will do a lot more." Then he asked his listeners this rhetorical question, "Do we shrink, or do we preserve and expand?"

Equally important to Netanyahu's victory is the support of recent Russian immigrants. It is estimated that there will be 680,000 Russians eligible to vote this year — 17 per cent of all voters. In 1996, the first election in which this group participated (their large-scale influx into Israel only began in 1989), they voted overwhelmingly for Netanyahu.

The Russians, who also have their own political party, Israel B'Aliyah, were a part of the Likud coalition that governed since 1996.

Today, there are signs of strain between Netanyahu and this all-important group. The leadership of Israel B'Aliyah, has without endorsing the Labour Party candidate Ehud Barak, appeared at events with him, providing Labour access to this constituency.

The Russians are a difficult group to reach for an important reason: they do not speak Hebrew. Their numbers are so large and their settlement patterns in Israel are so compact, that they appear to have no need to assimilate. They do not read the Hebrew press or watch Hebrew television. For example, a recent poll showed that a substantial number of Russian immigrants had no idea who all the candidates were who were running in the election.

The only way to reach this group is either through their leaders or by appearing on Russian television, which Israeli Russians watch via satellite from Russia.

And so in a campaign effort to reach out to Russian voters, Netanyahu and his Foreign

Minister Ariel Sharon made, between themselves, three separate trips to Russia in recent months. Since most Israeli Russians emigrated during and after the break-up of the Soviet Union, they not only do not harbour ill will toward their mother country, they have strong attachments to it. Therefore positive overtures made by an Israeli leader toward the Russian government and vice versa are viewed favourably by this constituency.

What has complicated Netanyahu's campaign ploy was that his government's visits to cozy up to Russia's leaders and send a message back to Russian voters in Israel came during a period when two international events conflicted with this effort. On the one hand, NATO has attacked a Russian ally, Serbia, and on the other hand, the United States is in the midst of considering whether or not to enforce sanctions against Russia for allegedly selling military technology to Iran (as is required by legislation that passed Congress with strong pressure from the Israeli lobby, against the wishes of the Clinton Administration).

And so, being the crass and manipulative politician that he is, the Netanyahu campaign's visit to Russia served to undercut both his ally, the U.S. Administration, and his lobby in Washington.

According to Israeli press accounts, Netanyahu promised the Russian Prime Minister that he would work against sanctions. This, according to one account, was apparently enough to win Netanyahu the praise of his Russian counterpart. While hunching with Netanyahu in Moscow, Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov was reported to have said, "I don't really want to interfere in Israeli politics, but if I were an Israeli citizen, I'd vote for Mr. Netanyahu in these coming elections."

Sure enough, immediately upon returning to Israel, Netanyahu urged the IMF to approve a \$4.8 billion loan to Russia. He also reportedly told the pro-Israel lobby to ease off Russia, causing some confusion, since it was a combined Israel-Israeli lobby campaign that saddled the United States with its bizarre sanction's policy in the first place.

The way that Netanyahu's government handled the NATO war on Serbia, so as to avoid alienating the Russians, has been even more irritating to the United States. In this effort, Foreign Minister Sharon has been serving as the pointman for his government.

While the Prime Minister has offered lukewarm support for the NATO offensive, Sharon has been outspoken and highly critical. His comments have been so breathtakingly undiplomatic they deserve to be quoted: "It's wrong for Israel to provide legitimacy to this forceful sort of intervention which the NATO countries are deploying, led by the United States, in an attempt to impose a solution on regional disputes. The moment Israel expresses support for the sort of model of action we're seeing in Kosovo, it's likely to be the next victim... Imagine that one day Arabs in the Galilee demand that the region in which they live be recognised as an autonomous area, connected to the Palestinian Authority... Brutal interventionism must not be legitimised as a way to try to impose a solution in regional conflicts." (This, of course, a shocking observation from the man who engineered the brutal Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982.) Sharon continued, "Far from easing the conflict, the American bombardments have caused suffering and sent tens of thousands of refugees fleeing." Sharon also made comments warning that should Kosovo win independence it might become part of "a greater Albania that will turn into a centre of Islamic terrorism in Europe... If a big block of Muslim countries develops in this area, this could be the of Islamic terrorism and the seed for this already exists there. This might lead to instability." It was reported in the Russian press that Sharon's comments were well received by that government.

Sharon has now become a frequent flyer to Russia, three visits in five months. Of course, each visit is explained as a policy meeting to deal with some pressing matter, but the real purpose appears to be the television coverage each visit brings home to Israel and to Israel's Russian voters.

Sharon made the intentions of his government perfectly clear last week in an interview with the New York Times' William Safire when he noted, "The key to next month's election is the Russian Israelis. Two-thirds of the Russian Israelis are for Bibi now. If I can get that up over 70 per cent, that's it."

The Clinton Administration used a visit by Sharon to Washington and a visit by Assistant Secretary of State Martin Indyk to Israel to make public its criticism of these Israeli ploys.

Obviously stung both by Israel's refusal to

honour the Wye Memorandum in which the Administration has been so heavily invested, and Sharon's support for Russian objections to the Serbian campaign, the Clinton Administration came quite close to doing what in 1992 it said it never would do: publicly criticise Israel.

In recent months the United States has been increasingly critical of Israeli settlement building not only referring to them as "obstacles to peace", but as "a complicating factor". A few weeks ago, a State Department Spokesperson went even further calling settlements a "dangerous obstacle to peace".

When Sharon met with Albright last week, the post meeting briefing described a less than friendly reception. The State Department spokesperson focused on the U.S. criticism of Israeli settlement activity noting that the United States was "particularly concerned" because such activity "makes it very difficult to pursue peace". He noted: "We also made clear that we're opposed to unilateral acts by Israel, including and especially settlement activity. Specifically, we're concerned about an accelerated pattern of Israeli actions on the ground since Wye which have become clearer in recent months."

In an effort to further accent their complaint with Israel on this matter, the U.S. apparently made evidence it had derived from satellite observations available to the Israeli press.

On the NATO-Russian matter, the Israeli press headlined the story "Indyk attacks Sharon in meeting with Netanyahu, U.S. diplomat: Foreign policy is about elections".

The story went on to describe Martin Indyk as "highly critical" of Sharon's new Russia policy and "indicated that he did not believe Sharon was acting on his own with this new policy". Another press account referred to Secretary Albright as "furious" with Sharon's comments.

And so, in the end, both cynical and manipulative Likud efforts to win increased support for the May 17 elections ran afoul of the United States. These developments raise two interesting questions. If in order to win over public opinion and win an election a Likud government must turn against the United States and violate agreements the United States and Israel have signed together, what does that say about the so-called "special relationship"? And on what foundation is that "special relationship" based?

Letters to the editor

Why the festival is important.

BACK IN Sweden after a wonderful and breathtaking week in Amman as guests at The Amman International Theatre Festival for Independent Groups we have heard about the attacks on the festival and feel very strongly that it is our responsibility to make a statement and make our standpoint quite clear.

We have been working with Mr. Nader Omran and The Fawanees Theatre Group for three years now. It has been work filled with difficulties, financial problems, alterations of plans, missing deadline after deadline, misunderstandings etc. etc.

Why are we so stubbornly doing this year after year? Is it because we are planning to impose our Swedish way of living and thinking on the artists and intellectuals of Jordan? The answer is — NO! We are of course fighting all the problems mentioned above, because we think it is very important for us to participate in the festival, working with people who have become close friends of ours, and meeting artists from almost the entire Arab world. Working together with artists like The Rum Group is important to us, as is exploring what we have in common and what differences there are. These meetings are important to us as artists. They allow us to be influenced, making it possible to bring back a little bit more knowledge every time we visit Jordan. These visits makes us able to fight the Eurocentric and sometimes anti-Islamic tendencies that is growing in our part of the world.

We find it surprising that the Jordan Actors Association are taking part against an important theatre festival like the Amman International Theatre Festival. We think the festival should get support from every individual and that Jordanians should be very proud of the efforts being made to make the festival possible.

All of us want to thank Mr. Nader Omran and The Fawanees Theatre Group for making these encounters possible. We want to express our gratitude to the people of Jordan who makes every visit memorable and, yes, indeed we want to come back and continue the wonderful work we have started together.

Leo Collberg,
 Director, Backa Theatre
 Executive Member of The Swedish Actors Union
 Gothenburg
 Sweden

The challenge of tomorrow

AS WE move towards the 21st century, the challenge for educators and the global educational systems is daunting indeed. The challenge of the next millennium will not only be how to eliminate the "millennium bug", or how to advance a new kind of teaching; most importantly, the challenge will be to focus on how to eliminate human suffering and ethnic hatred by teaching most effectively present and future generations tolerance, multicultural co-existence and respect for religious and cultural differences.

Technological advances have dramatically changed our daily lives, to the better they say, yet evil forces seem to rule the minds and hearts of certain humans and politicians who favour the brutal policies of ethnic tyranny and forceful up-rooting of civilian life. The obsession with power and control over territories has left no room for any decency or regard for human dignity and integrity. The Kosovo conflict is a premeditated collaborated plot against humanity and the most recent example of how ethnic hatred and chauvinism can turn into a dangerous military gamble resulting in a human tragedy of enormous magnitude. When all this is over and the maps are eventually re-drawn, only the suffering and bitter memories will remain, and enough hatred to last for many future decades. How to heal the human race is the challenge of today and tomorrow.

Rumiana M. Nuseibeh
 Amman



Morality? You must be joking

By John Pilger

THE STRUGGLE of people against power' wrote Milan Kundera. 'is the struggle of memory against forgetting.' The idea that the NATO bombing has to do with 'moral purpose' (Blair) and 'principles of humanity we hold sacred' (Clinton) insults both memory and intelligence. The American attack on Yugoslavia began more than a decade ago when the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund set about destroying the multi-ethnic federation with lethal doses of debt, 'market reforms' and imposed poverty. Millions of jobs were eliminated; in 1989 alone, 600,000 workers, almost a quarter of the workforce, were sacked without severance pay. But the most critical 'reform' was the ending of economic support to the six constituent republics and their reconversion by Western capital. Germany led the way, supporting the breakaway of Croatia, its new economic colony, with the European Commission giving silent approval. The torch of fratricide had been lit and the rise of an opportunist like Milosevic was inevitable.

In spite of his part in the blood-letting of Bosnia, Milosevic, the 'reformer', became a favourite among senior figures in the U.S. State Department. And in return for his co-operation in the American partition of Bosnia at Dayton in 1995, he was assured that the troublesome province of Kosovo was his to keep. 'President Milosevic', said Richard Holbrooke, the U.S. envoy, 'is a man we can do business with, a man who recognises the realities of life in former Yugoslavia.' The Kosovo Liberation Army was dismissed by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright as 'no more than terrorists.' Last October, the Americans drafted a 'peace plan' for Kosovo that was pro-Serbia, giving the Kosovars far less autonomy and freedom than they had

under the old Yugoslav federation. But this deal included, crucially for the Americans, a NATO military presence. When Milosevic objected to having foreign troops on his soil, he was swiftly transformed, like Saddam Hussein, from client to demon. He was now seen as a threat to Washington's post-cold-war strategy for the Balkans and Eastern Europe. With NATO replacing the United Nations as an instrument of American global control, its 'Membership Action Plan' includes linking Albania, Macedonia, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia. Like Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic before them, these impoverished countries will be required to take part in a \$22 billion weapons' build-up. The beneficiaries will be the world's dominant arms industries of the U.S. and Britain — the contract for fighter aircraft alone is worth £10 billion.

Like the 1991 'moral crusade' in the Gulf, which slaughtered more than 200,000 people, including the very minorities the West claimed to be protecting, the terror bombing of Serbia and Kosovo provides a valuable laboratory for the Anglo-American arms business. Mostly unreported, the Americans are using a refined version of the depleted uranium missile they tested in southern Iraq, where leukaemia among children and birth deformities have risen to match the levels after Hiroshima. The RAF is using the BL755 'multi-purpose' cluster bomb, which is not really a bomb at all but an air-dropped land-mine: readers will recall the Blair government's 'ban' on land-mines. Dropped from the air, the BL755 explodes into dozens of little mines, shaped like spiders. These are scattered over a wide area and kill and maim people who step on them, children especially.

Britain's new military-industrial-arms trade, which Margaret Thatcher built and the taxpayer

subsidises through 'soft loans' to dictatorships, is central to the 'Blair project.' Each time New Labour has sought to bring big business into the fold, arms companies or their representatives have been at the head of the queue. A New Labour backer is Raytheon, manufacturer of the Patriot missile and currently under contract to the Ministry of Defence to build tanks. More arms contracts have been approved by the Blair government than by the Tories; and two-thirds of arms exports go to regimes with appalling human rights records — such as the dictatorship in Jakarta, which is currently deploying death squads in East Timor.

Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that British-supplied small arms have caused in East Timor the equivalent of the Dambora massacre many times over. Last year, the Defence Secretary, George Robertson, intervened in a Comtals Aerospace deal for armoured vehicles, headed for Indonesia's Kopassus special forces whose commander, General Prabowo, he described (in a letter to Robin Cook) as 'an enlightened officer, keen [on] human rights'. Kopassus is the Waffen SS-style force that spearheaded the invasion of East Timor, murdered five journalists and is responsible for the worst atrocities in the illegally occupied territory. When Prabowo's father-in-law, the tyrant Suharto, was toppled from his throne last year, the general was also sacked.

The parallels with Kosovo and East Timor are striking. However, no bombs will fall on Jakarta. They might hit the local offices of British Aerospace (supplier of machine guns and Hawk fighter bombers) and the Defence Export Sales Organisation, the Blair government's official merchants of death who, as Thatcher used to say, 'are bating for Britain.'

— The Guardian

What lessons the Middle East should learn from the Asian crisis

By John Manser

EVENTS HAVE demonstrated conclusively that the globalisation of financial markets is now a reality, and share prices in London and New York have fluctuated on a daily basis due to decisions taken on the other side of the world. Countries which have prudent monetary and fiscal policies have continued to thrive.

A number of important lessons about the way in which the global financial market operates can be learned from the Asian crisis. These are of relevance to countries in the Middle East. Let me begin therefore by rehearsing the main sequence of events in Asia.

What began in 1997 as a relatively minor problem of currency over-valuation and imprudent bank lending in a handful of South East Asian countries rapidly developed by mid-1997 into a crisis of confidence in the Asian growth model. Belatedly, investors began to realise that high rates of economic growth and investment were not being reflected in increase in corporate profitability.

Over-investment in unproductive assets, excessive government ties to industry and implicit government guarantees of bank loans to industry came gradually to be seen as symptoms not of an "Asian miracle" but of an "Asian disease." In the second half of the year, a round of competitive devaluations was set in train which dramatically weakened countries' external position.

In particular, the devaluations increased the debt burden for a number of countries which had built up substantial short-term foreign currency debts which exceeded

foreign exchange reserves. This led to emergency rises in interest rates and further declines in stock markets.

The crisis eventually resulted in debt rescheduling and IMF programmes for Indonesia, Korea and Thailand. Initially, foreign bank lenders and investors withdrew funds from Asia but continued to make them available to other emerging market countries. In fact, in early October, several emerging market stock market indices in Eastern Europe and Latin America hit all time highs.

During October, however, the Asian crisis spread to Hong Kong, culminating in a full blown attack on the currency and emergency rise in interest rates. Although the Hong Kong-U.S. dollar peg held, the stock and property markets in Hong Kong went into rapid decline. At the same time, investors and bank lenders — faced with the possibility of unrecoverable losses on their Asian exposures, began to retreat from other emerging markets where risk was perceived to be high. Russia was and continues to be particularly badly affected.

By the beginning of 1998, as economists began to forecast outright recession in much of Asia, the ripple effect spread to developed markets. Stocks in the U.S. and Europe with exposure to Asia began to underperform. Commodity prices weakened, particularly in oil and metals. Loan defaults in other Asian countries dealt a blow to Japan's already weak banking system and led to a run on the yen. The U.S. government had for the first time in the current administration to intervene in the currency market in support of the yen. The Asian crisis therefore clearly

demonstrates that the global financial market is a reality which all of us must accept. Yet, amidst the turmoil, the Middle East has remained a haven of calm in a stormy sea along with Europe and the U.S.

Middle East equity markets have outperformed those in other regions by a considerable margin. Since the start of 1997 an equally weighted portfolio invested in the main index stocks in the Middle East has recorded a U.S. dollar return excluding dividends of 3.8 per cent. This compares with falls of over 20 per cent in Latin America, Eastern Europe and Asia, and a decline in the region over 40 per cent from their peak a year ago.

Part of the explanation for this outperformance is that Middle Eastern currencies have remained largely unaffected by Asia. An equally weighted portfolio of Middle Eastern currencies has retained almost all of its value versus the U.S. dollar over the last 18 months, whilst portfolios of Asian, Eastern European and Latin American currencies have all recorded significant losses. Finally, interest rates, so volatile elsewhere in the emerging world, have remained largely stable in the Middle East.

Is the Middle East different and will it continue to be different in the future? The answer to the first question is clear. Firstly, despite substantial economic reform and liberalisation, the Middle East remains less integrated in the global trade and financial market system than any other region except Sub-Saharan Africa excluding South Africa. Secondly, macro-economic fundamentals are steadily improving in the Middle East.

The Middle East remains less open to trade than other emerging market regions. The sum of exports and imports as a percentage of GDP is significantly lower than in Asia. There is therefore generally less potential for trade shocks to destabilise the Middle East. The main exception is of course for those countries exporting oil. The weaker oil price has already led to shortfalls in budget revenues in Oman and Saudi Arabia and this has had an impact on the stock markets in both countries. To some extent, however, this effect is offset by lower prices of imported manufactured goods.

Crucially, the Middle East is much less reliant than other regions on inflows of foreign capital to finance investment. In 1996 net inflows of foreign capital to the Middle East averaged three per cent of GDP. This was well below the levels seen in Asia and Latin America. Again, this relative self-reliance makes the region less vulnerable now that foreigners are withdrawing capital from emerging markets.

Finally, three points. First, macro-economic fundamentals are improving rapidly in the Middle East as they deteriorate elsewhere. Secondly, financial sector liberalisation is at a much earlier phase than in Asia or Latin America, and finally, there has been little of the speculative lending seen in Asia.

Most of the countries of the Middle East have moved to cut budget deficits and control the money supply. As a result inflation is generally low and they have been rebuilding foreign exchange reserves rapidly while reserves have peaked and are now falling in Asia.

Looking ahead, it is unlikely that the

'...in many respects it is better to be a tortoise than a hare'

Middle East will continue to be insulated from the global financial market. Nor should it wish to be. For most of history, openness to international trade and investment flows has been a positive force for economic growth and improvements in living standards. It will continue to be so in the future.

A major lesson, however, should be learned from the Asian crisis, which countries of the Middle East would do well to observe. It is that in the global financial market large inflows of foreign capital into small countries whose financial systems are not adequately developed and regulated can ultimately prove destructive.

Such financial systems will not tend to price risk properly, particularly where banks feel that governments and ultimately taxpayers offer an implicit guarantee of a bail-out. Precious resources will tend to be misallocated and yet must still be repaid should macro-fundamentals deteriorate.

Countries should therefore avoid liber-

alising access to foreign finance ahead of putting their domestic house in order. In particular, they must seek to deepen domestic financial markets by developing an institutional investor base which can act as a counter-balance to foreign capital flows in time of international pressure. This will take time, but as Asia has shown, in many respects it is better to be a tortoise than a hare.

Governments should place a premium on attracting foreign direct investment and portfolio equity investment in which foreigners share risk. This involves developing an attractive regulatory and tax environment for foreign equity investment.

Governments should avoid accumulating debt, and in particular short-term debt which is not related to underlying trade finance. In no circumstances should short-term debt exceed foreign exchange reserves.

Central banks must monitor the domestic banking system carefully and in particular police currency mismatching of assets and liabilities and concentrations in exposure. Both of these were important factors underlying the Asian crisis.

If the Middle East can proceed cautiously along this road, using to its advantage its traditional conservatism, I remain convinced that the global financial market will work to its benefit.

The writer is Chairman of Flemings, an independent British merchant bank. The article is based on a presentation given to the London World Financial Centre earlier this year.

— Economic Research Forum

King begins 'historic' visit to Syria today

(Continued from page 1)

"We want to discuss ways to strengthen our trade relations, and at the same time remove obstacles to trade exchange," one official said.

Figures show that trade between Jordan and Syria has slumped, with Jordan's imports last year falling to a quarter of the JD99 million level recorded in 1996.

Water, however, is expected to top the talks.

"We have several issues to be discussed with our Syrian counterparts regarding water shares, dams and water quality," said another official.

A water expert said Syria has built some 26 dams on the Yarmouk River and it has also expanded use of the spring waters that feed

the river, especially in summer.

"It is not certain that the Maqarin dam, renamed in 1986 to Al Wihdah dam, is feasible in light of the increased Syrian water activities in its catchment," said the expert, who asked not to be named.

"Another understanding is necessary to stabilise the summer flow from the Yarmouk to Jordan," the expert noted, adding, "It is to put a ceiling on the Syrian usage of springs and ground water, and to limit the uses from the river until after a dam is built on it."

Such an understanding, along with possible Syrian releases from their dams for Jordan's benefit in the summer, will undoubtedly boost the ability of Jordan to provide drinking water

to its population, the expert noted.

An issue that officials say they don't expect to be raised during the visit is that of Jordanian prisoners in Syrian jails.

"The issue needs to be discussed in detail," said the official. "Therefore, we'll keep it for the higher committee to tackle."

Officials say that about 700 Jordanians have been detained in Syria for years without charge.

Jordanian-Turkish military cooperation has created another point of contention between the two neighbours.

Many Arab countries see Amman being drawn into a three-way military pact with Ankara and Tel Aviv which would leave Damascus isolated and vulnera-

ble. "The importance of building warm and closer ties with Turkey will also be discussed during the King's two-day visit," said Lawzi.

Jordan has defended cooperation with Turkey, including joint army and air force training, saying that it poses no threat to Syria.

"Turkey has relations with many other Arab countries... It is an important regional party," Khatib said. "We will continue to enjoy these relations with Turkey."

King Abdullah's visit to Syria comes after an Arab tour that has included Egypt, the Gulf states and Libya, where he also held talks with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

Serb, Albanian troops exchange border fire

(Continued from page 1)

Blair issued the clearest signal yet from any NATO leader that the alliance is gearing up to put ground troops into Kosovo.

Blair insisted that Milosevic would not be allowed a veto on any action the alliance decided was necessary to meet its key objective of ensuring the hundreds of thousands of refugees driven out of Kosovo were allowed to return home.

But he said NATO could do little for the refugees if they are stranded in Kosovo's wooded hills and valleys except to press on with its air war until Milosevic backed down.

"We're deeply worried about the people inside Kosovo. The only chance they have got, however, is [for us] to make our campaign successful. There is literally nothing more that they need than making sure that our campaign is successful."

A huge column of Kosovo refugees was said by international aid workers to have gone missing on the way to Albania, raising fears for their safety at the hands of Yugoslav security forces.

Aid agencies said there was no sign of more than 100,000 people who had been spotted by other refugees queuing up near

the Albanian border on Saturday, mostly on foot. Only about 100 refugees arrived in Albania on Monday.

The U.N. refugee agency, UNHCR, suggested in Geneva that the missing refugees had been forced onto side roads by Yugoslav forces and were still being held there.

Allied military commanders have said air-dropping food and aid to those living in the open would pose too great a risk to NATO pilots, although France has said it intends to try.

Meanwhile, reports of Serb atrocities against ethnic Albanians in Kosovo mounted on Tuesday. In London, British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook said a first batch of intelligence reports alleging Serb atrocities in Kosovo had been passed to the U.N. War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague.

Cook said a second dossier was currently being drawn up providing evidence of mass murder, "ethnic cleansing" and systematic rape (see story on page 5).

NATO said it had "reliable" reports that Serb forces in Kosovo were using captured Albanian boys as young as 14 as "blood banks" for their injured troops.

NATO also said Serb forces were carrying out

"ethnic cleansing" operations in Montenegro, which makes up the federal Yugoslavia with Serbia and has so far kept out of the conflict between NATO and Belgrade.

NATO spokesman Jamie Shea said villages close to the border with Kosovo had been attacked in recent days. "This is something new and very distressing," he said.

The official Yugoslav Tanjug news agency said at least one person was killed and 11 people were wounded in NATO attacks on a cigarette factory and other industrial targets in Nis, the Balkan country's third biggest city, overnight. Ten houses were also destroyed and the same number damaged, it added.

NATO said it had, for the first time, destroyed a support site for Yugoslav "Frog" surface-to-surface missiles, which have a range of 65 kilometres.

Albanian television reported that the first of 24 U.S. Apache helicopters arrived in Albania on Tuesday to boost NATO's firepower against ground forces. U.S. officials have said the helicopters will take a week to start operations.

International aid officials, struggling to cope with the influx of refugees, hailed as a breakthrough

on Tuesday a decision by Macedonia to drop its opposition to the building of a big new refugee camp.

Ron Redmond, UNHCR spokesman in Macedonia, said construction had already begun. "We are extremely relieved. It gives us a bit of light at the end of the tunnel," he told Reuters.

In Belgrade, thousands of Serbs turned up to pray for peace at a service led by the head of the Russian Orthodox church, Patriarch Alexy II.

After meeting the patriarch, Milosevic said he saw a key role for Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church in ending the NATO bombing.

The patriarch accused NATO of trying to impose on Yugoslavia an order "based on the dictates of brute force."

"We are witness to illegality backed by certain powerful and rich countries which consider they can judge good and evil, which trample upon the desires of people who want to live differently," he said.

Romania's defence chiefs gave their approval Tuesday for NATO to use the country's airspace to mount bombing raids on Yugoslavia. A similar request has been addressed to Bulgaria.

Bangladesh girls sold to misery

By Shakespeare Shil
Reuters

WHEN JAHANARA was asked by her newly wed husband to go to Pakistan almost two years ago, she readily agreed.

He told Jahanara there would be better jobs for them there, that they would leave behind the grinding poverty of Bangladesh. He even knew a friend in Karachi who could put them up.

Two days after the couple arrived in the bustling port city, Jahanara discovered she had been sold to the "friend" by her husband, who turned out to be trafficking women regularly.

She and five other Bangladeshi girls were imprisoned in his house, raped frequently by their new "owner" who also hired them out at parties at the house for wealthy foreigners.

After a few months, Jahanara began a noisy fight with the other girls in a bid to escape. That drew the attention of the neighbours, who called the police.

Jahanara, now 25, was repatriated to her mother's home in Bangladesh and has been mentally ill since her harrowing ordeal. Bangladeshi rights groups say most of the 10,000 girls taken to India, Pakistan and the Middle East by traffickers every year are not as lucky as Jahanara.

They say about 500,000 Bangladeshi girls smuggled out in the past decade are now languishing in foreign brothels or jails.

Traffickers sell the women to prostitution rings or to households as bonded labour. Children are usually sold to organisers of camel races as jockeys or into rings of beggars.

Traffickers thrive on the poor and vulnerable, luring women or their gullible guardians by promises of better jobs and marriages. Sometimes they resort to kidnapping.

"Local agents of international trafficking networks... pick on young women and children divorced or deserted by their polygamous husbands or parents, displaced from rural homes by poverty or natural calamities," said Sigma Huda, head of Bangladesh's Coalition Against Trafficking in Women.

Prices for girls varied from hundreds to thousands of dollars, depending on age, beauty, education and even family background. Prices for children were based on physical fitness.



Young girls rescued while being smuggled out of Bangladesh by traffickers prepare to cook at a safe home in Dhaka (Reuters photo)

"Smugglers use all routes," said Salma Ali, executive director of the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association, which gives legal aid to the victims.

Bangladesh's 4,200-km border with India is easily breached. Zohora was 11 when she was taken to the home of her step-sister's husband, an Islamic holy man. He had said she needed to see a witch doctor because a jinn, or spirit, had put a curse on her.

"But (he) sexually abused me...then proclaimed that I have been married to him by a jinn. He took me to India on promises of a pilgrimage," Zohora, now 14, told Reuters.

In the eastern Indian state of West Bengal, he confined her to a house, raped and beat her every night.

With the help of a local shopkeeper, she escaped and fled back to her father's home, only to find the influential holy man had forced her family to leave the village.

Destitute and heartbroken, she went to her tormentor's home in central Bangladesh. "He returned home and beat me up mercilessly," Zohora said.

With help from her 18-year-old step-sister, who was the 19th girl the holy man had married, she fled to the southern city of Khulna and began working as a maid servant.

When he rushed to Khulna to bring her home, Zohora's employer sent her for protection to a local jail. Two weeks later, a court sent her to a shelter in Dhaka, where

she now stays.

"He has ruined my life, my sister's life and the lives of many girls of our village and locality. I want him hanged," the soft-spoken girl said, breaking down in tears.

Trafficking, forced prostitution and repression of women and children can be punished by life imprisonment or the death penalty in Bangladesh. But poor enforcement, bungled police investigations and lack of evidence means they seldom are.

Only two traffickers are reported to have been punished with life imprisonment in Bangladesh, lawyers say.

A top police official said the government planned to form a 750-member special force to combat crimes against women and children.

Once taken out of Bangladesh, the women and children are completely helpless. In Pakistan, they can be arrested and charged with both illegal entry into the country and jinnah, or sex outside marriage — both of which can be punished by death.

"Many Bangladeshi girls are in Pakistan jails standing trial on charges of jinnah and illegal entry to the country," said Ali, of the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association.

"Back home, the girls fear reporting their abuses in a hostile society that blames the victims for their sufferings and often sanctions violence on them."

Israel agrees to provide Jordan with full water share — officials

(Continued from page 1)

As part of the government's efforts to cope with problem, a USAID-backed crisis manager will arrive here in May to coordinate with the government in implementing the contingency programme.

However, the Ministry of Water and Irrigation, which

revealed that among the 510mcm of water pumped from private and public wells, only 275mcm are taken within safe parameters, did not declare its measures to cope with such depletion or plans to effectively promote public awareness on water conservation.

The capital, home to almost half of the Kingdom's population of 4.6 million, has had to bear a water rationing regime almost every summer for the last 10 years.

Jordan's population is expected to increase from 5.3 million in 2000 to more than eight million by 2020 — a factor which will severely strain the country's water resources.


The Kingdom's current water resources only amount to 960mcm a year. The water deficit, projected to grow to 250mcm by 2010 from 220mcm in 1995, is being covered through the use of groundwater resources, some non-renewable, at over 200 per cent of their safe yields.

OECD: Agriculture trade, commodity prices to pick up over next five years

THE BETTER HALF.

By Glasbergen

Glasbergen



"I wasn't the most important person at the meeting."

JUMBLE

Unscramble these four Jumbles. One letter to each square to form four ordinary words.

TELIT

Circle letters inside the boxes, in all eight squares.

CEIPE

PHOCON

TAIROD

Print answer here: A

(Answers Monday)

Yesterday's Jumbles:


Answer: BOGUS SWOOP HECKLE BEETLE

is this — THE BOSS

You might say every self-employed person

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME

by Harl Arnold and Mike Argentin



Now arrange the coded letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Government postpones implementing second phase of sales tax until next year

**** AS THE** necessary preparations are not ready to implement the second phase of the sales tax, the government has decided to postpone this stage until next year instead of 1999, Finance Minister Michel Marto confirmed this week. Under the first phase, producers, manufacturers and providers of services collect a 10 per cent tax on the value of local and imported goods as well as the charges on services from the consumers and transfer the amounts to the Department of Customs.

The second phase of the sales tax,

the rate of which is still not specified, will be wider as it will include all selling points covering especially the wholesalers and retailers.

Within this framework, it has been learnt that the Ministry of Finance started taking the necessary measures to separate the sales tax directorate from the Department of Customs in accordance with an earlier government decision. Consequently, an independent sales tax department will be set up to handle all issues related to the sales tax (Al Aswaq).

Industrial Estates Corporation boosts earnings by JD1m to JD5.3 m

**** THE INDUSTRIAL** Estate Corporation earned JD5.3 million last year, JD1 million more than earnings recorded in 1997. The amount translated into JD3.8 million profit after various expenditures were taken into account. The corporation's balance sheet showed that the value of capital projects under execution reached JD4.5 million compared to JD160,000 at the end of 1997. The increase was a direct result of starting to implement the Karak

Industrial Estate and the completion of expanding the Al Hassan Industrial Estate in Irbid.

The balance sheet also showed that the corporation's assets totalled JD40.1 million at the end of 1998 compared to JD36.9 million at the end of 1997. Noting that the capital remained unchanged at JD12 million since 1985, the shareholders' equity totalled JD32.3 million, around JD3.7 million higher than the 1997 total (Al Ra'i).

JTC needs JD340m of investments

AMMAN (Petra) — Minister of transport, telecommunications and post on Tuesday said the Jordan Telecommunications Company (JTC) needs JD340 million worth of investments to be able to provide high

quality service. Addressing a press conference held at the ministry, Jamal Sarairoh stressed the need for Arab and foreign investments in the telecommunications sector to cope with the rapid developments

in this field. However, he said, the telecommunications sector is progressing well despite major challenges posed by the rapid advances in technology and the tough competition by telecommunication companies in the neighbouring countries.

Sarairoh said the JTC will continue to be the only provider for the regular telephone service until the year 2003, when a licence for another company will be issued.

On the mobile telephone service, Sarairoh said the JTC hopes to provide this service before the end of this year, in addition to providing the Internet service through a company owned by the JTC. Referring to security fears resulting from using the latest telecommunication technology, Sarairoh said such fears are unjustifiable at a time when satellites can monitor anything around the clock, adding that the defence and telecommunication laws in the Kingdom do not allow for such fears.

Reviewing the corporation's financial situation, Sarairoh said the company is financially sound, adding that the company's expected to collect JD217 million in revenues by the end of this year.

Lebanese banks face tough year with weak economy

BEIRUT (R) — Banque Audi has predicted a tough year for the banking sector, with little 1999 growth in the Lebanese economy as the government grapples with deep fiscal problems.

In a briefing on the Beirut bank's results in the first quarter of the year, officials emphasised that growth of its loan portfolio and assets had slowed sharply from the rates of recent years.

Profits for the quarter were up 31.6 per cent on the same three months of 1998 at 13.62 billion Lebanese pounds (\$9.04 million). But the bank had earned \$37.5 million in all of last year, a rise of 21.5 per cent over 1997 results.

"We achieved in the first quarter the average of last year divided by four so we have much less expectations for this year," said Marc Audi, deputy general manager of the blue-blooded bank.

Assets rose only two per cent in the first three months of the year, but more than the sector. Loans rose 1.3 per cent, reflecting

its conservative credit policy. At the same time the bank increased reserves to 5.4 per cent of total loans from 5.07 per cent at the end of 1998.

Non-interest income slipped to 18 per cent of total income from 19.7 in December because of sluggish capital markets, where Audi is a major player, said Freddie Baz, chief strategist at the bank.

"One should not expect important growth in the GDP (gross domestic product). Personally, I wouldn't be surprised if it is a zero per cent growth rate (in 1999), it may be one per cent, 1.5 per cent," Baz told financial analysts.

He said consumer price indices had shown deflation of as much as 1.5 per cent in the first quarter, "material proof of the stagnation/recession in the economy."

Baz said by the time Prime Minister Selim Al Hoss' budget is presented to parliament and approved it would affect only the second half of the year. The

budget is to increase various taxes and curb spending in order to hold the deficit below last year's 43 per cent of spending.

Despite the gloomy outlook for banks after years of booming profits following the end of the 1975-90 civil war, Baz said his bank was happy to face stagnant economic conditions in the short-term if it meant the government produced a more stable economic future for Lebanon.

"We are optimistic for the medium-term because the challenges we are facing today are still short-term," Baz said.

He added that the current economic situation was not important for the bank. "In the trade-off between short-term growth and medium-term political and financial integrity, we are for the medium-term political and financial integrity for the country because this is what will generate much higher growth rates in the medium-term."

"What we are witnessing at the level of political, administrative and fiscal reform is much more important for Lebanon than the GDP growth rate for 1999," he emphasised.

Lebanon under Prime Minister Rafik Al Hariri, who left office last December, ran huge budget deficits, hoping that economic growth would be sufficient to finance the ballooning public debt.

The debt, listed by the central bank at \$17.4 billion, is estimated at 114-117 per cent of annual GDP.

Debt servicing, at 47 per

cent of expenditure and 78 per cent of revenue, is the largest item in the budget.

Meanwhile, a senior Lebanese financier said on Tuesday investors are losing patience with government delays in revealing its plans for reform and to stimulate the economy.

"We are clearly in a recession. Expatriates are glad they did not come back and investors feel they are not well-served by the government which cannot rely on the trust it enjoys indefinitely," said Anthony Tarazi, who headed capital markets at local finance house Lebanon Invest before leaving to set up his own company.

"The government has to put charts and words on the table showing Lebanon moving away from fiscally stimulated growth to one that is more based on fundamentals," said Tarazi, breaking ranks with other financiers who have not criticised the government publicly.

"The previous administration relied on a fiscal stimulus which created growth irrespective of the waste and mismanagement that took place. There was the perception that things were happening," said Tarazi, whose new company is just being formed.

The new government headed by Hoss took office in December promising to depart from the debt-financing of its predecessor, clean up the bureaucracy and sharply reduce the budget deficit through a five-year plan that has not been unveiled.

"Afraid to go on record,

the administration is not talking, not showing continuity or explaining what and how it wants to achieve," said Tarazi, who based in New York before returning to Lebanon at the start of the recovery in early 1990s.

After a flurry of optimistic statements promising to quickly privatise everything from the loss-making national airline to the electricity monopoly, the government has been largely silent, failing to release details of the draft budget announced earlier this month.

"Investors are in the dark. We clearly need a bullish plan from someone who sounds bullish. This government is too morose and relies disproportionately on the image of austerity," the financier said.

"It has to market Lebanon and invite people to buy a slice of the economy. Lebanon has a lot going for it: Nice weather and real estate, a reemerging and service-oriented economy forming a hub, or at least a stepping stone for Syria, Jordan and eventually Iraq," added Tarazi.

He said the government was harming investment by relentlessly reexamining the projects of the previous administration of billionaire Hariri, such as Solidere, the company rebuilding downtown Beirut.

"Solidere is Lebanon. If the government fights Solidere it is shooting itself in the foot. The markets factor in such erratic behaviour," Tarazi said.

Embattled Balkan economy is in dire need of international support

(Continued from page 8)

the euro's 10 per cent fall in value against the dollar since its launch in January had already occurred before the crisis.

The fundamental cause of the fall in the euro level was the difference in economic performance between the United States and the euro area, Mossa said.

Apart from the heavy economic burden of the huge influx of refugees into Albania and Macedonia, the latter is likely to suffer from a loss of trade with Yugoslavia, the IMF report said.

Other neighbouring countries, particularly Bulgaria and Romania, "will be affected by the disruption of transportation links and by the increased caution among investors toward the region."

Croatia in particular will suffer because of a fall in tourism, the report said.

It noted that the IMF and World Bank, along with other donors, "are assessing the additional financing needs of the countries in the Balkan region."

The World Bank last week announced three initiatives

worth \$72 million to help refugees from Kosovo and to help Albania cope with the influx.

France has proposed that the Club of Paris creditor governments give Albania and Macedonia a two-year moratorium on debt payments and is hoping for progress on this issue at the IMF and World Bank spring meetings in Washington next week.

Albania has external debt of about \$900 million (\$33 million euros) and Macedonia of \$1.2 billion (\$1.1 billion euros).

In 1998, Albania obtained cancellation of half of its external debt and rescheduling of the rest.

In the Macedonian capital Skopje, a World Bank official said on Tuesday Macedonia is facing financial collapse as a result of the conflict in Yugoslavia.

"On the face of it, the situation is bad and is going to get worse in the next few days and months," Zoran Andonovski, a World Bank official, told AFP.

With Yugoslavia, Macedonia's main trading partner, under fire, Macedonia's

external trade has gone into freefall and unemployment is rising at a dizzying speed.

Yugoslavia previously absorbed 25 per cent of Macedonia's exports and was used by 90 per cent of its overland transport to the markets of the European Union, Andonovski said.

The situation has been exacerbated by the withdrawal of investors since NATO launched its air campaign against Yugoslavia on March 24.

Andonovski said that joblessness in the former Yugoslav republic was between 35 and 40 per cent, which he warned "is going to increase dramatically" in the next few months.

Added to this grim picture is the steady stream of impoverished ethnic Albanian refugees flowing into the country from war-torn Kosovo. Interior Minister Pavel Trajanov said on Tuesday there were 160,000 Kosovo refugees in Macedonia. "We will soon have as many unemployed as that," Trajanov said, adding that it was "therefore in NATO's interest to cooperate with us to avoid a collapse of our economy."

A.S.E TRADE ACCESS 4648868 Tuesday, 20-04-99

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CARD AMMAN BK 2,400 2,370 -1.25%

BN OF JORDAN 1,250 1,200 -4.00%

MIDDLE EAST BK 0,540 0,580 +7.40%

PARIS BANK 1,300 1,300 0.00%

THE JORDANIAN BK 2,370 2,310 -2.53%

JO KIWAT BK 1,000 1,000 0.00%

JO GULF BK 0,850 0,840 -1.18%

JO ISLAMIC BK 1,500 1,500 0.00%

JOUBA BK 1,000 1,000 0.00%

MART ELAM 0,570 0,570 0.00%

PHILADELPHIA BK 0,520 0,520 0.00%

BANK INDEX 264,430 POINT -0.07%

INSURANCE

JERUSALEM INS 1,370 1,340 -2.19%

JO FRENCH INS 2,270 2,320 +2.20%

INSURANCE INDEX 121,960 POINT +0.22%

SERVICES

ELECTRIC POWER 1,650 1,670 +1.21%

PORTFOLIO SECURITIES 0,820 0,800 -2.44%

INTL TRADING CENT 0,250 0,250 0.00%

AL-BAY 0,600 0,620 +3.33%

AL-ZARQA FOR EDU 0,800 0,800 0.00%

ALAM INTL FOR REVE'S EDU 1,750 1,660 -5.14%

UNIFIED LAND TRANS 1,000 1,000 0.00%

UNIFIED FOR JORDANIAN WIVES 1,070 1,050 -1.87%

SERVICES INDEX 109,060 POINT -0.02%

INDUSTRY

PHOSPHATE 2,240 2,220 -0.90%

AMPHOTAN 4,350 4,300 -1.15%

TELEPHONE REPAIRERY 10,000 10,000 0.00%

TELEPHONE COMM & AGRIC 1,810 1,820 +0.55%

AMM PHARMACEUTICAL 2,800 2,800 0.00%

CEMENT IND 1,250 1,200 -4.00%

DAIRY 2,210 2,270 +2.71%

FOOD & CIGARET 7,200 7,150 -0.69%

JOUBA 1,400 1,400 0.00%

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HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR WEDNESDAY, APRIL 21, 1999

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) The company you're expecting is someone you're a little tense around. Now, tension in so Aries is not a pretty sight. If you include humour in your arsenal, you're more likely to solve the problem, wind up with a fabulous party and also get your point across.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) It might feel like you're in the middle of a war zone this morning. You're a natural peacemaker, so do that. You're also the one who gets to clean up some of the messes that others create. Are you having a birthday party for 2-years-old, or what?

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) You want to spend your money on a worthy cause. The problem is that you need to keep enough to cover your own expenses. Don't go on a crusade to save the homeless and then become one yourself. That would be counterproductive.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) You're strong this morning, although you may feel like you're fighting off a herd of dragons. You can ask an older person for money this afternoon. If you've done your homework, it should be pretty easy to get.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) Be careful to stay on schedule. There could be detours, especially if you're travelling. Take one this morning to finish up several things that have been nagging at you. Once these are out of the way, the rest of the day will be relatively easy.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Consult with a friend first thing this morning. You'll get some excellent advice. You could also get a couple of ideas about how to save money. If you're investing money, take care. The friend who's advising you against it is probably right.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) Your nerves will be on edge first thing this morning. Try to keep from getting into an argument with an older person or with your mate. You're supposed to be the peacemaker, remember? This morning, that's going to be a real challenge.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) You're running into all sorts of problems, but nothing seems to phase you. That's good, because there's a bigger problem coming up this afternoon. Somebody wants to order you around. Obviously this person doesn't realise who you are.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Pick up a manual for a technical gadget you've been trying to learn. If you take a little extra time with that today, you'll be in a stronger position later. You'll also get work done quickly so you'll have more time to play.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) The only way you'll get a mess cleaned up this morning is by getting somebody to help. There are probably several people who would love to pay back a favour you've done them. You go out of your way for other people all the time. How about letting one of them do the same back at you.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) Things are breaking down about as fast as you can fix them. Instead of trying to do everything, how about sharing the load? You'll not only make your life easier, but you'll help the other person become more competent.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) It looks like you'll be accident-prone early in the day. You're most likely to get in trouble by moving too quickly and not paying attention. The resulting breakage could be rather expensive, so just settle down.

Birthstone of April: Diamond — Amethyst

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Salt Lake Games corruption scandal claims first sponsor

LONDON (AFP) — The corruption scandal surrounding the 2002 Winter Olympic Games has claimed its first victim, the Financial Times said Tuesday, reporting that Johnson et Johnson had pulled out of a \$30 million deal.

Quoting a spokesman for the U.S.-based healthcare group, the FT said the company was not going ahead with the deal partly because of allegations over Salt Lake City lavishing gifts and payoffs on International Olympic Committee (IOC) members.

John McKeeagan, the Johnson et Johnson spokesman, said the main reason for pulling out was an inter-

nal disagreement about how to market the group's brand during the Olympics, but added the scandal also played its part.

"It was always going to be in the back of people's minds," he was quoted as saying.

Johnson et Johnson is the first company to admit the corruption allegations have played a role in their decision to drop sponsorship plans.

The group has sponsored the Olympics for decades, particularly in providing products to American athletes, and had intended to increase its expenditure, said the FT. The scandal stemmed from 2002

Winter Olympics bidders Salt Lake City lavishing cash payoffs and expensive gifts on IOC members to secure votes when the time came to name a host city.

A U.S. federal grand jury is investigating the matter.

Among measures being considered by the U.S. Congress are cutting tax breaks for U.S. firms sponsoring the IOC.

Those would be staggering blows to the IOC because nine of the 11 top IOC sponsors are U.S. firms who pay 10 to \$15 million a year to the committee.



San Francisco Giants second basemen Jeff Kent sails through the air as he watches his throw to first base during the fourth inning at 3COM Park in San Francisco. Florida Marlins Alex Gonzalez beat out the throw for a single on a close call by umpire Frank Pulli (Renters photo)



Franz Nietlisbach of Zolingen, Switzerland crosses the finish line to win the men's wheelchair division of the 103rd running of the Boston Marathon 19 April 1999 in Boston, Massachusetts (AFP photo)

Surprise leader forced out of rally

LLORET DE MAR, Spain (AFP) — Surprise Catalunya rally leader Jesus Puras of Spain was forced to quit on Tuesday when his Citroen refused to start.

His withdrawal saw fellow Citroen driver Philippe Bugalski move in front.

Meanwhile Britain's Colin McRae, instead of heading home early with Welsh co-driver Nicky Grist after suffering turbo problems, has opted to continue and carry out vital testing work on asphalt roads in the still new Ford Focus.

"It's a real shame," said McRae who will start the penultimate day in 33rd place, more than seven minutes adrift. "I had hopes of making it three wins in a row here, but now we will have to use the rest of the day to test."

"I had no warning with the problem. There was a sudden loss of power about half-way through the stage. I checked the engine but there was nothing obviously wrong."

McRae was in a highly-competitive sixth place when he was forced to stop on the fifth and longest stage of the day, losing several minutes to his rivals as well as collecting 80 seconds in time penalties.

But McRae, who is second in the championship just two points behind Finland's Tommi Makinen, might not lose too much ground in the battle for the drivers' title.

Benfica sack Souness; Heynckes takes over

LISBON (AFP) — Graeme Souness was sacked as coach of Portuguese giants Benfica, club president Joao Vale e Azevedo said on Monday at a press conference.

The club added former Real Madrid coach Jupp Heynckes of Germany would take over from Souness next season.

"Jupp Heynckes has signed a contract for two years," Vale e Azevedo said.

The 45-year-old Souness, who played for the successful Liverpool side in the late 70's and early 80's, still had a year left to go on his contract.

Souness has blamed Benfica for not backing him financially and he has been fiercely criticised by media and fans in Portugal with the club in third place in the League, trailing leaders Porto by nine points.

"I'm not happy about it but I understand why," said Souness. "I understand the pressures that have been building up and I knew at the start of the season that we had to win the championship. At this present time we don't look like winning the championship, unless Porto slip up badly."

"But the job description 18

months ago was very different to the reality and that's not a criticism of the president because he's encountered bigger problems than he thought he would when he first took the job."

Souness has come under fire for his tendency to field British players and play with what are seen as British-style tactics. He has repeatedly complained that the debt-ridden club did not provide cash to buy quality players.

He recruited several players from England, including Welsh internationals Mark Pembroke and Dean Saunders, and former Liverpool and Arsenal midfielder Michael Thomas.

Brian Deane and Scott Minto both returned from Portugal after spells under Souness.

"I have to say I think I have done a very good job with the resources I have had at my disposal. I think if you look at the club when I came we have improved it in every sense - the organisation, the quality of player here."

Fans have waved white bandkerchiefs as a sign of farewell and chanted for Souness to be fired in recent games.

Vale e Azevedo said that while

Souness was ultimately to blame for the team's recent poor performances, his efforts had also been undermined by poor refereeing and "regrettable nationalistic sentiments" among fans.

Souness, capped 54 times by Scotland, was also sacked in October 1997 as coach of Italian Second Division club Torino when he was less than four months into a two-year contract.

He quit earlier in 1997 as manager of Southampton after one season in the job and enjoyed limited success during his time as manager at Anfield, although he won the FA Cup in 1992.

He was far more successful in Scotland where he led Rangers to three League titles and four Scottish League Cup wins before switching to Liverpool in 1991.

Heynckes, who has signed a two-year contract, steered Real Madrid to the Champions' Cup last season but was sacked for only finishing fifth in the Spanish league.

Juventus ready to show United the exit

TURIN (AFP) — Juventus will walk out here on Wednesday night determined to reach their fourth consecutive Champions League final, and to shatter the dreams of Manchester United.

Alex Ferguson's men may have been the dominant force in English football for the past 10 years. But they have always been also-rans in Europe's top tournament, never once reaching the final during that time.

Now they start as underdogs against a Juventus side who will have home advantage at the Delle Alpi stadium and a precious away goal from their 1-1 draw in the semi-final first leg.

The Italians also have a track record that doesn't inspire confidence for the English club — they have met United four times before in Europe and each time Juventus have gone on to reach the final.

This time, they will be fired up

after a morale-boosting 3-1 victory over Serie A leaders Lazio last weekend in Rome, a feat achieved without the help of rested French star Zinedine Zidane.

Coach Carlo Ancelotti is likely to stick to the same 4-4-1-1 line-up which proved so effective against United in the first leg, with Zidane playing behind lone striker Filippo Inzaghi, but supported by a four-man midfield which is determined to move forward rather than back.

Dutchman Edgar "Pit Bull" Davids, who poked the ball through for Antonio Conte's goal at Old Trafford, is playing probably the best football of his career in Italy and will be in awesome form on Wednesday.

Conte is also on song, with a rash of goals at national and international level, while Angelo Di Livio is a constant menace on the flanks and hardman Didier Deschamps remains

as solid as ever.

Ancelotti, who replaced Marcello Lippi last February said: "This is the most important match in my career so far as a football coach."

"But I hope that after Wednesday night, the most important will be a different one: the final on May 26 in

"The Lazio game showed that this team are on form. When they take things carefully and are fully concentrated, they are difficult to beat."

He summed up: "This is a good period for us, both physically and mentally, even if we know the match against Manchester United will be

60 minutes, but the last half-hour was like being in hell."

"The main problem was their aerial game — they are much better than we are with the high ball, and they could be even more dangerous on Wednesday if Sheringham plays."

As for his own team, Deschamps said: "Our finishing will have to be better: in Manchester we had several chances to make it 2-0 but didn't take them. Failing to deliver the KO blow this time could be fatal."

"It would be an enormous risk to be still drawing 0-0 with a quarter of an hour left to play."

For Juventus are not the only ones to be coming off a good win.

Ferguson's re-shuffled side trounced Sheffield Wednesday 3-0 on Saturday and the coach was clearly impressed.

"I'm delighted with my players, their intensity and application was superb," he said. "If they produce

that kind of effort it'll be hard for Juve to knock us out."

Though Sheringham hopes to have played himself into the team after scoring last weekend, Ferguson will probably stick by Andy Cole and Dwight Yorke up front.

The one major doubt is winger Ryan Giggs, who snatched the dramatic late equaliser against Juventus a fortnight ago, but who has been out with an ankle injury since scoring last week's FA Cup replay winner against Arsenal.

"Ryan's got a 50-50 chance and we will have to wait and see," said Ferguson on Monday.

Ferguson badly needs the Welsh wizard, not only for his dribbling and passing ability, but also for his knack of scoring goals in important matches. And they don't come much more important than Wednesday night.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Barcelona...

Ancelotti was buoyed up by his team's display in Rome but said: "The satisfaction at both the performance and the result is conditioned by just one concern — that the euphoria doesn't get out of hand and become dangerous," he said. "But I'm not that worried."

an extremely tough one, right through to the very end."

Deschamps, the man who captained France to their World Cup triumph, was more cautious about events on Wednesday night.

"I think each side has a 50/50 per cent chance of qualifying," he said. "At Old Trafford, we played well for



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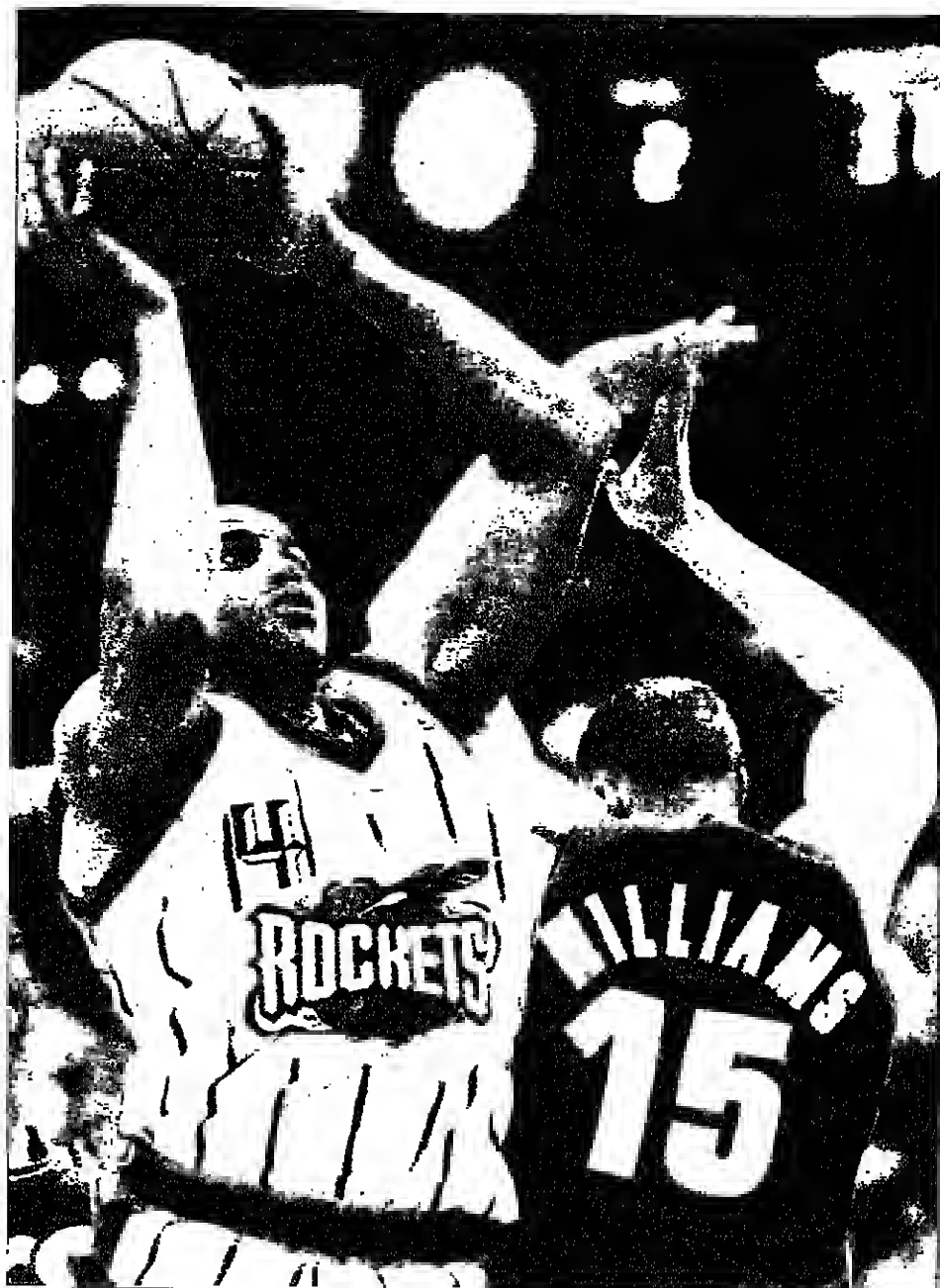
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Charles Barkley of the Houston Rockets takes a shot during the first half of play versus the Seattle SuperSonics at Compaq Centre in Houston, Texas. Defending on the play is Seattle's Aaron Williams (AFP photo)

Raptors stifle East-leading Magic

TORONTO (R) — The Toronto Raptors held the Orlando Magic to nine points in the second quarter and 14 in the third, bolstering their quest for their first playoff berth with a 90-72 win over the Eastern Conference leaders Monday.

The 72 points allowed and 32.5 per cent shooting by the Magic were defensive records for the young Toronto franchise.

Tracy McGrady scored 12 of his 16 points in the fourth quarter, when he was also a force on the offensive glass. Kevin Willis also had 16 points, and Vince Carter 14.

"When my confidence is up, I can do anything on the court," said McGrady, who also had 11 rebounds and has three double-doubles in his last eight games.

"I'm 19 years old. I should have a lot of energy. The past couple of games, we've all been more focused. We have playoff potential, so we know what we need to do," the Raptors (20-20) moved into a tie with New York (21-21) and Charlotte (20-20) for ninth place in the Eastern Conference, one-half game behind Cleveland for the final playoff slot in the east.

Darrell Armstrong scored 12 points and Penny Hardaway added 11 for Orlando, which has lost three of its last four games after a six-game winning streak. The Magic (29-13) lead Miami (27-13) by one game atop the Atlantic Division and Eastern Conference.

In Cleveland, Dan Majerle scored a season-high 22 points and the Miami Heat moved closer to the top spot in the Eastern Conference standings with a 94-87 victory over the Cavaliers.

Averaging just 6.7 points per game, Majerle finished 8-of-11 from the field and 5-of-7 from 3-point range.

"I got my 3-pointers off the drives and double

teams," Majerle said. "Alonzo (Mourning) and P.J. (Brown) both did a good job of finding me." Jamal Mashburn tallied 23 points and Majerle added 19, nine blocked shots and seven rebounds for the Heat, who have won eight of their last 10 games.

In New Jersey, veteran sharpshooter Chuck Person came off the bench to drain three crucial 3-pointers down the stretch as the Charlotte Hornets extended their season-high winning streak to eight games with a 120-113 over the floundering Nets, tightening the Eastern Conference playoff race.

The Hornets have gone 16-9 under interim coach Paul Silas.

In a rough, sloppy game in Philadelphia marked by a slew of blown opportunities, Patrick Ewing's miss of a potential running jumper with 23 seconds left allowed the 76ers to escape with a 72-67 victory over the Knicks.

"This was a game we should have won," Ewing said after the Knicks drew even late in the game but never led. "We had our opportunities. We were right there, but we didn't make the right plays at the end." New York has lost a season-high four straight.

In Boston, Reggie Miller scored 23 points as the Indiana Pacers kept coach Larry Bird perfect against his former team, rolling to a 120-104 victory over the Celtics.

Chris Mullin added 21 points and Antonio Davis 17 off the bench for Indiana, which snapped a two-game losing skid and pulled within two games of Orlando for the Eastern Conference lead. The Pacers are third in the East.

Bird improved to 7-0 against Boston as Indiana coach.

"I told my team tonight before the game we need to

win the rest of our games, all eight," said Bird. "I want U.S. to be on a roll. I expect U.S. to win them all."

In Houston, Charles Barkley got a basket on the offensive boards and a free throw, and Sam Mack's seventh 3-pointer just 26 seconds later broke open a close game down the stretch and gave the Rockets a 120-113 victory over the Seattle SuperSonics.

Barkley had 25 points, 10 rebounds and seven assists for the Rockets, who have won four of their last five games. Mack scored 21 points off the bench, all on 3-pointers as he shot 7-of-11 from behind the arc. The teams combined for 22 3-pointers.

In Anaheim, rookie Jason Williams scored 19 points and handed out a season-high 14 assists as the Sacramento Kings rallied for a 102-98 victory over the Los Angeles Clippers.

Corliss Williamson scored 23 points for Sacramento (19-22), which moved into a tie with Seattle for the final playoff spot in the Western Conference.

At Los Angeles, sparked by reserves Robert Horry and rookie Tyrone Lue, the Lakers snapped a three-game losing streak with a 117-102 victory over the lowly Vancouver Grizzlies.

Horry scored nine of his season-high 17 points in the fourth quarter and Lue had eight of his season-high 15 in the period as the Lakers outscored Vancouver 36-22 over the final 12 minutes.

Shaquille O'Neal scored 31 points for the Lakers, who remained 1 1/2 games behind Houston for fourth place in the Western Conference.

Agassi quits Monte Carlo Open; Becker leaves after father dies

MONACO (AFP) — America's Andre Agassi added to a high-profile exodus from the Monte Carlo Open here on Tuesday when he announced that he is dropping out of the \$2.45-million event because of a shoulder injury.

No. 7 seed Agassi has suffered a recurrence of the problem which forced him to pull out of last week's Japan Open. He will be replaced in the draw by Italian qualifying lucky loser Vincenzo Santopadre.

Earlier Tuesday, Germany's Boris Becker also quit the tournament after the death of his father on Tuesday.

Karl-Heinz Becker, 63, died in a clinic in Heidelberg on Monday night after a long fight against cancer.

"I am very sad, I admired my father and I owe him a lot," Becker said. "In this difficult situation, I have to and want to be close to my family. Especially my mother needs me."

Karl-Heinz Becker, 63, died in a clinic in Heidelberg on Monday night after a long fight against cancer.

Becker who entered the tournament on invitation had reached the second round by beating Frenchman Cedric Pioline on Monday and was due to take on another French player Jerome Golmard.

Becker last week came back from Asia, withdrawing before the Japan Open after reaching the final in Hong Kong when his father's condition worsened.

At age 31, Becker is determined to retire after a final fling at Wimbledon this summer, followed by a farewell to Stuttgart in July at the Mercedes Cup.

Agassi won his first tournament in Asia earlier this month when he completed a rain-interrupted victory over long-time rival Boris Becker in the final of the Hong Kong Open.

Henman crashes out of Monte Carlo Open

MONTE CARLO (AFP) — Tim Henman let a match point chance slip away as Brazil's Fernando Meligeni knocked the British third seed out of the \$2.45 million Monte Carlo Open 6-7 (5/7), 6-4, 7-5 in the second round on Tuesday.

Meligeni, ranked 51st in the world, proved his clay credentials in two hours 38 minutes. Henman, who had his winning opportunity late in the third set, duplicated his opening-match loss here from a year ago.

In the third set, the Brazilian earned a break for 6-5 with a superb game as his 28 winners on the afternoon began to mount up. Henman took treatment from the trainer at the changeover for cramp in his left leg.

A flailing backhand cross-court yielded three match points for the South American. Meligeni advanced when Henman's backhand flew just wide.

The Briton had nine break points, but converted only two of them. His career clay record stands six wins, 14 losses.

"I feel very happy, every match I play is a marathon for me. I have to fight a lot," said the winner. "I did well today. I fought a lot. This time was for me."

In the first set, Henman fell behind an early break against Meligeni, who reached the quarterfinals last week in Barcelona and the Brazilian moved to a 4-1 lead on Centre Court. The Briton's early effort was compromised by 13 unforced errors in the first five games as the South American imposed his clay-court style on the Briton whom he had never faced.

Henman's aggressive athleticism kept him in the fight and he reached three break points with Meligeni serving to conclude the opening set.

The third-seeded Briton broke for 4-5 as his opponent volleyed into the net. Henman then produced a love game, 5-4. Meligeni's form faded momentarily as he faced a pair of break points a game later, both saved, the second on a serious Henman over-hit return.

The Briton cut off a return from his opponent and got a third game-winner, also salvaged with a return. Henman returned wide to give the South American a 6-5 margin, but held to force a tiebreaker. Henman won it, 7-5, after 55 minutes of battle.

Meligeni, an experienced clay court player, didn't roll over, breaking for 2-1 in the second set and going level at a set each when Henman leaped high to smash an overhead and frustratingly found the net instead.

The Brazilian took the initiative in the third set with a break, losing it in the fourth



Moroccan Hicham Arazi hits a forehand to Croat Goran Ivanisevic during their first round match at the Monte Carlo Open. Arazi won 6-1, 6-4 (AFP photo)

as a revitalised Henman levelled, 2-2. The match stayed on serve as Henman emerged from three deuces to take a 5-4 lead with a precision overhead smash.

Meligeni gambled on a volley return at the net, but missed to give the Briton a match point. Henman returned short.

Two other seeds moved into the second round. No 10 Albert Costa of Spain defeated Argentine Mariano Zabaleta 6-3, 6-4. Thomas Enquist, the No. 12, served for a straight-set win, but had to go the full distance to overcome Dominik Hrbaty of Slovakia 7-5, 6-7 (4/7), 6-2 in a match which earned a small measure of revenge for a Davis Cup upset earlier this month.

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Saudi football coach sacked

RIYADH (AFP) — The Saudi Arabian Football Federation on Tuesday sacked its Olympic football trainer, German national Pieter Hahnhurg, the official SPA news agency said. The move follows the dismal performance by the team in the World Youth Championships taking place in Nigeria. The team lost 1-3 to Australia and 0-2 to Ireland and drew 1-1 with Mexico.

Ribbeck backs second referee

BONN (AFP) — Germany coach Erich Ribbeck on Tuesday gave his backing to the use of a second referee in German championship matches. "There are at least five good reasons for it, but none against," he said. Ribbeck said that he had already approached the German Football Federation (DFB) to ask them to put pressure on FIFA to accept the idea.

S. African national coaches sacked

JOHANNESBURG (AFP) — Angola, Mozambique and Namibia have sacked their national coaches following disappointing African Nations Cup qualifying results. Brazilian Djalmir Cavalcante replaces Yugoslav Vesselin Jelusic after Angola crashed 2-0 at home to Mauritius and Mozambique fired Joao Albasine following a 6-1 humiliation by Cameroon in Maputo. Namibia dumped Seth Boois when they lost 3-0 in Cote d'Ivoire and German Peter Ueberjahn takes over as coach with local Reston Mogane his technical assistant.

Puel extends Monaco stay

MONACO (AFP) — Monaco coach Claude Puel has signed a three-year deal with the Principality club, the French first division side announced Tuesday. Assistant coach Jean Petit and goalkeeping coach Jean-Luc Ettori have also renewed their contracts for three years. Puel replaced Jean Tigana as coach at Monaco earlier this year.

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Ecevit begins to court Turkish nationalists to form government

ANKARA (R) — Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit appeared on Tuesday to have begun the courtship of a hard-line nationalist leader who swept to prominence in Turkey's weekend elections, staking what seems an irresistible claim to power.

As initial astonishment over Sunday's elections eased, Tuesday's newspapers carried tentative approving remarks by Ecevit about Nationalist Action Party (MHP) chief Devlet Bahceli and by Bahceli about Ecevit.

To form a government, both must put behind them acrimonious horn of a decade of left-right street fighting in the 1970s that ended in an army coup. Ecevit must convince himself, even if he will never convince left-wing supporters, that the MHP has disowned a history of radicalism.

"Mr. Ecevit is a valued statesman brought up in Turkish political life," Bahceli told one newspaper.

"It seems the MHP has abandoned its old line," Ecevit said. "Devlet Bahceli has renewed the party."

"MHP and DSP flirting," the

liberal Radikal daily declared.

Ecevit's Democratic Left Party (DSP), according to computer projections, should win 133 votes in the 550-seat assembly. The MHP, which failed to clear the 10 per cent hurdle for seats in the assembly in 1995, could take 130 seats.

Bahceli appeared to discount what for markets would be a nightmare alliance between MHP and the Islamist Virtue Party, with which it shares some religious and cultural values.

"It seems to me [Virtue]

should have a spell in opposition."

The same poll result that sent the stock market diving by up to six per cent on Monday, appeared on Tuesday to offer grounds for optimism. Shares rose over eight per cent, with brokers encouraged by the gentle courtship and eager press

years of instability.

MHP would cede influence over the economy in return for a nationalist role in foreign policy, education and domestic security. While this might be attractive to business, it could unnervingly those who identify the MHP and its founder, Alparslan Turkes, with violent "Grey Wolf" youth gangs.

"It is well-known that the MHP does not regard with any warmth issues such as democratisation and aligning Turkish laws with human rights conventions, which it sees as being responsible for terrorism," commentator Haluk Ulman wrote in Dunya newspaper.

The MHP may make itself felt over the conflict in the southeast, which voted the Kurdish Hadeep Party into local government on Sunday despite accusations in Ankara that it backs guerrilla leader Abdullah Ocalan. The nationalist sentiment stirred by Ocalan's capture helped both Ecevit and Bahceli.

"The perceptions of nationalism in both parties are very close," Zulfu Livanli wrote in Sabah newspaper.

"For the first time in 75 years

of the Turkish republic, excepting the Hadeep masses of course, a homogeneous Turkish nationalism has evolved. As western Europe has chosen to begin the 21st century with leftist governments, Turkey is beginning 2000 in nationalist currents."

Not everyone believes in the neat DSP-MHP-ANAP equation.

Excluded from the formula are the vital elements of MHP ambition and, always vital in Ankara politics, personal chemistry and ego.

"Turkish politics has never witnessed a coalition between the first and second parties," Sabah commentator Abdurrahman Yildirim said. "One must be in power, the other in opposition."

Ismet Berkan of Radikal suggested Bahceli might already be looking beyond Ecevit, knowing that if the veteran premier's efforts to form a government failed, he would be the next person summoned to the president's palace.

"If you were Bahceli, would you rather be prime minister or deputy prime minister?" he asked.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Arafat to discuss state with Mubarak

CAIRO (AFP) — Palestinian President Yasser Arafat was due here Wednesday for talks with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak about whether to declare a Palestinian state on May 4, officials said on Tuesday. Foreign Minister Amr Musa said they would discuss "the results of contacts made by the Palestinian National Authority president on his [current world] tour" as well as "the issue of the date of proclaiming a Palestinian state." The Palestinian leadership will meet at the end of April to decide whether to go ahead with a threat to declare a Palestinian state in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank on May 4, when the interim period of autonomy runs out. Arafat visited Rabat on Monday as part of an Arab and international tour aimed at an increasing world support for the right of the Palestinians to proclaim their own state.

Trial over charges against minister

CAIRO (AFP) — Four Islamist journalists were ordered Tuesday to stand trial on libel charges after accusing Egypt's agriculture minister of collaborating with the Israeli secret service, the prosecutor's office said. Al Shaab newspaper's managing editor Magdi Hussein and three colleagues are accused of libeling Youssef Wali, who is also the governing Democratic National Party's secretary general, it said. They were ordered to stand trial by state prosecutor, Gaber Riham. Al Shaab has led a campaign accusing Wali of destroying Egyptian agriculture and collaborating with Israeli Mossad experts in suspicious and destructive agriculture experiments. Wali filed a lawsuit against the four at the beginning of April.

Death sentence sought against Ocalan

ANKARA (AFP) — Three Turkish prosecutors have called for capital punishment for jailed Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan in a 135-page indictment, the semi-official Anatolia news agency reported on Tuesday. The indictment holds Ocalan responsible for all acts of his Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) and charges him with "treason and crimes against the state and its sovereignty" under article 125 of the Turkish penal code, the report said. The indictment has not yet been made public and is being checked for the last time by the prosecutors. The prosecutors are expected to submit the document this week to the state security court of Ankara, which has been hearing a treason trial in absentia against the PKK leader since 1997. The indictment will also be notified to Ocalan and his defence team headed by attorney Ahmet Zeki Okcuoglu. The Ankara court's next hearing is scheduled for April 30 and the court is expected to unite the ongoing case with the new indictment and set a date for the main trial of the rebel leader, Anatolia said.

Netanyahu absent from peace stamp

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AP) — U.S. President Bill Clinton and PNA Chief Yasser Arafat feature prominently in the commemorative Wye River accords stamp; even more prominent by his absence is Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The Palestinian National Authority (PNA) is issuing a stamp next week commemorating the October Palestinian-Israeli land-for-security accords brokered by the United States. It features a painting drawn from a photograph of the U.S. president, the Palestinian leader and the Israeli prime minister signing the accords at the White House. Netanyahu is cropped out of the painting. "It is a stamp commemorating those who have invested a lot of effort in peace," Omar Magdadi, a director general at the postal authority, said when asked why Netanyahu was dropped. The stamp will be available in Palestinian-run post offices in the West Bank and Gaza Strip on April 24, said Magdadi. It has a 4.50 shekel (\$1.10) value. The stamps are valid as postage to every country in the world, except Israel, which accepts only Israeli stamps from the Palestinian-held territories.

Tehran declares war on dogs

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran's highest judicial official, Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi, called for the police to keep dogs and other pets off the streets, Kayhan paper reported Tuesday. "This is an Islamic city, and keeping domestic animals in the house is no problem, but their being walked on the streets is an insult to others, and the police can intervene," said Yazdi, one of the Islamic republic's leading conservatives. The authorities have been calling for years for dog owners to refrain from walking the animals in parks and streets. In 1994, Tehran's mayor prohibited dogs from appearing in public places for religious and hygienic reasons. Islam considers certain animals, particularly dogs, "impure," and advises against any contact with them. But Iran's younger generation has developed an affinity for "man's best friend," particularly in big cities and northern Tehran where having a dog is considered luxurious.

'Egyptian suspect in embassy bombings arrested in U.S.'

CAIRO (AFP) — U.S. authorities have arrested a fugitive Egyptian Islamist who was sentenced to death here but is also wanted in the United States for anti-American activities in Africa, a newspaper reported Tuesday.

The Egyptian authorities are seeking his extradition as a military court condemned him and eight others to death on Sunday for plotting a new wave of attacks in Egypt, the pro-government daily Al-Ahram reported.

It did not name the individual but a police source, requesting anonymity, identified him as "the Islamist, Ali Abul Saud Mustafa, a former Egyptian army officer who was condemned on Sunday by the supreme military court in Cairo."

Mustafa had been asked by Saudi fugitive Osama Ben Laden to gather information about U.S. embassies in Africa, the source said, adding he then visited Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria and Somalia in 1995 and 1996. "The United States is carefully examining the possibility he was implicated in the attacks against the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam," which killed 224 people in August 1998, he added.

Mustafa, 45, resigned from the Egyptian army in 1984 before moving to the

United States where he has been living and from where he made several visits to Afghanistan.

"Because of his experience in the army, he has assumed an important role as an official providing military training to Jihad members in their camps in Afghanistan," the police source said. Investigations led by the U.S. and Egyptian security services revealed that he led fundraising activities in the United States to finance Jihad activities, the source said.

He allegedly helped Jihad leader Ayman Al Zawahiri, also sentenced to death on Sunday and who is believed to be in Afghanistan, enter the United States in 1995 to raise Jihad funds from mosques in the U.S. state of North Carolina.

These details have been confirmed by confessions from fellow Jihad member Khaled Abul Dahab who was sentenced Sunday to 15 years imprisonment with hard labour, he added. Abul Dahab is an Egyptian who became an American citizen and who travelled to the United States with Mustafa's help.

Jihad joined the Front for the Liberation of Islamic Holy Sites set up in February 1998 in Peshawar, Pakistan, under the leadership of Ben Laden. Zawahiri is Ben Laden's lieutenant.

Egypt scraps loophole for rapists who marry victims

CAIRO (AFP) — The Egyptian parliament has repealed a century-old law exempting a rapist from punishment if he marries his victim, a decision that drew immediate praise Tuesday from human rights activists.

Parliament unanimously adopted the change late Monday after a public outcry in December over a decision by the authorities to free three men accused of rape when one of them married the victim.

Justice Minister Faruk Seif Al

Nasr told the People's Assembly before the vote that the "rapists used this article of the law only to avoid being punished."

The proposal to change the penal code was first submitted to the assembly last week by the cabinet which was acting on a request from President Hosni Mubarak.

Leading Egyptian human rights activist Haifia Abu Saada immediately hailed the change.

"It's another important step toward Egyptian women

obtaining all their rights in society in line with the constitutional principle of equality," Saada told AFP.

Marrying the victim "did not end psychological suffering," he said, adding that his Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights recorded cases where women who married rapists sought psychiatric help the rest of their lives.

"Article 291 was unacceptable because it allowed the perpetrator of an odious crime to

avoid punishment," he added. "In many cases, [the rapist] divorced his victim days after the marriage ceremony at the police station."

Rape victims have in certain cases accepted offers of marriage from their attackers to minimise the disgrace to their family in conservative Egyptian society.

Egypt's top Muslim official, Mufti Nasr Farid Wasseel, called in January for an "urgent" change of section 291 of the

penal code, which he said was adopted under Britain's occupation of Egypt at the end of the 19th century.

"A rapist's offer to marry his victim should not erase his punishment. Otherwise, this is a violation of Islamic law," he said. Any marriage between a rapist and his victim is "null and void," the mufti said.

Under a law enacted in 1980, convicted rapists can face the death penalty.

South Lebanon truce panel urges return to status quo in Arnoun

NAQOURA (AFP) — The international panel monitoring the truce in southern Lebanon called on Tuesday for "concrete steps" to restore the status quo in a village seized by Israeli troops last week.

The monitoring group called for "concrete steps that would allow a return to the situation in Arnoun prior to April 15, when Israeli soldiers and members of the Israeli-allied South Lebanon Army (SLA) occupied the village on the northern edge of Israel's self-declared "security zone."

The committee — composed of representatives of Israel, France, Lebanon,

Syria and the United States — made the call in a statement issued after a meeting at the U.N. headquarters in this border town.

The panel, charged with monitoring the truce accord reached after Israel's 1996 "Grapes of Wrath" operation in south Lebanon, met Monday to examine three Lebanese complaints of truce violations and one Israeli complaint.

On Arnoun, which Israel incorporated into the "security zone" Thursday, the committee "noted the serious concerns... [and] potential for raising tensions" of Israel's "move to control Arnoun by mili-

tary means."

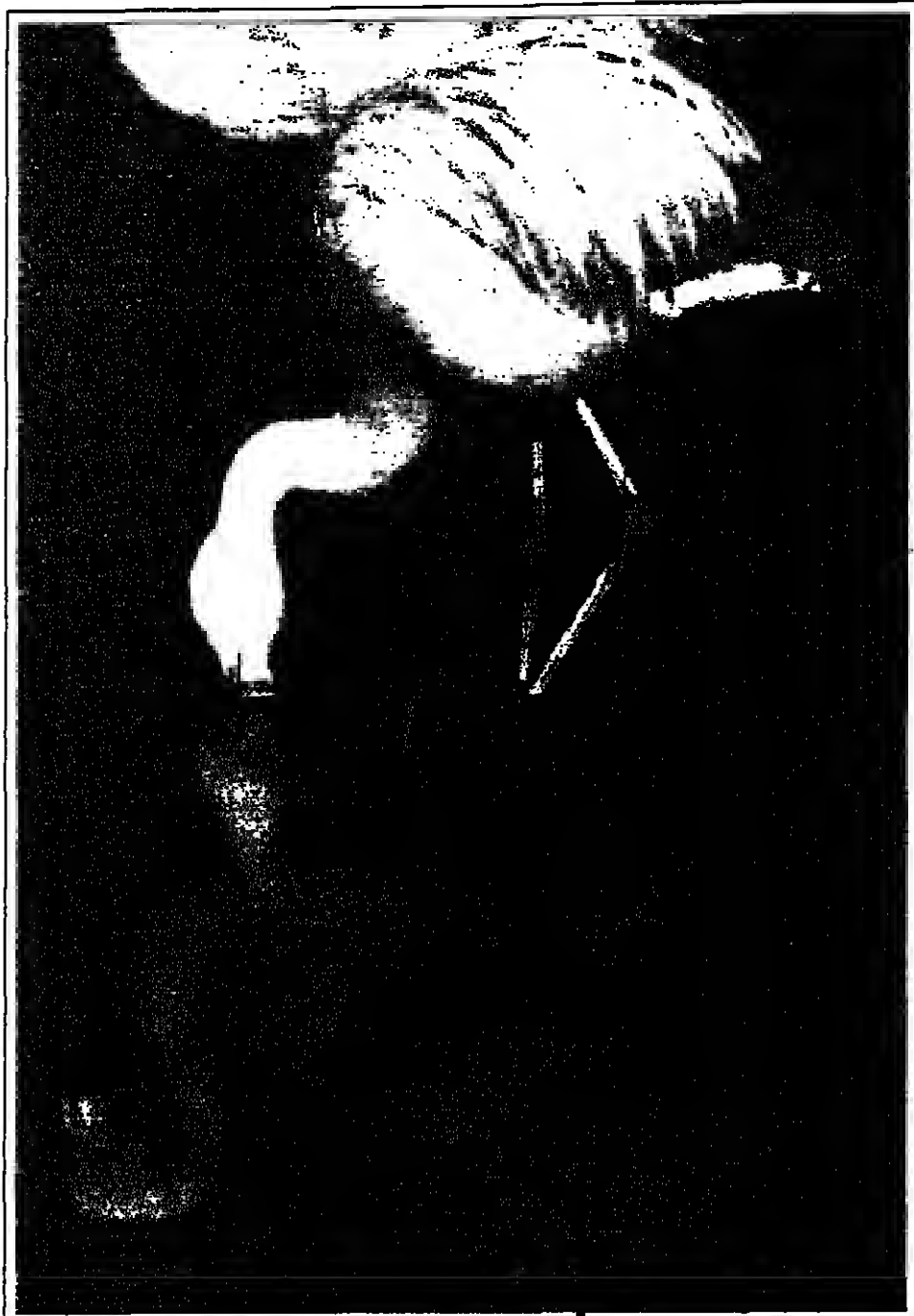
The panel "acknowledged there were differing views on whether this action fell within the purview of the understanding and constituted a violation."

"The group nonetheless agreed that it was in the interest of all sides to seek a solution to the issue of Arnoun and that, to this end, the issue should be further examined on an urgent basis, both by the parties and in bilateral channels, with a view to addressing the legitimate concerns of the parties."

"The monitoring group agreed that the

goal of this effort would be the taking of concrete steps that would allow a return to the situation in Arnoun prior to April 15, ensure respect for the provisions of the understanding concerning the non-use of civilian areas as launching sites for military activities, and reduce sources of tension," it said.

A Lebanese government official told AFP the panel had "entrusted the United States and France to establish bilateral contacts with Lebanon and Israel to determine the concrete measures to restore the status quo in Arnoun."



REFLECTIONS OF FLAMINGOS: Two flamingos are mirrored on the surface of a pond in the Westfalenpark in Dortmund on Tuesday. Weather forecasts predict mild temperatures for the next few days in Germany (AFP photo)

Islamists reject Israeli offer of 'small mosque' in Nazareth

NAZARETH (AFP) — Islamist politicians in this Arab Israeli town rejected on Tuesday a government offer to permit construction of a small mosque next to the Basilica of the Annunciation, one of Christianity's holiest shrines.

Salman Abu Ahmad, leader of the Islamic Movement which controls the town council, said local Muslims were maintaining demands that a large mosque be built on the site despite angry opposition from the Vatican and other Christian church authorities.

"This proposal is not acceptable and we call on the authorities not to give in to pressure from the Vatican and Christian groups," Abu Ahmad told AFP.

Following months of sometimes violent disputes between Arab Christians and Muslims in Nazareth over a plot of land next to the Basilica, the Israeli government on Monday authorised the construction of small mosque on part of the area.

The decision, taken by a high level ministerial committee, overruled Nazareth Mayor Ramez Jerassi, a Christian, who has refused to let the mosque be built and rejected claims by local Muslim leaders that the disputed land belonged in the past to an Islamic trust.

Jerassi's municipality, backed by the Vatican and other Christian churches, planned to

create a pedestrian plaza at the site to improve access to the Basilica of the Annunciation for hundreds of thousands of pilgrims expected to visit Nazareth for the Millennium.

The government's compromise plan was to permit construction of a mosque on about 500-square metres of land next to the church — 250 square metres of it taken from the 1,800-square-metre area

Christian leaders wanted to turn into a plaza and 250 square metres from an adjacent plot.

At the same time an unspecified "physical separation" would be built between the mosque and the basilica plaza and the government would make a 3,000-4,000 square metre plot available elsewhere in Nazareth for construction of a "grand mosque," Israeli officials said.

Abu Ahmad's movement initially claimed control over a 1,000-square metre area adjacent to the basilica and has occupied a large tent at the site for months.

On Tuesday, Abu Ahmad said Muslims would be willing to accept 800-square metres of the plaza area for their mosque and vowed to maintain the protest tent until they obtained satisfaction.

Christian officials, who earlier rejected the construction of any mosque next to the basilica

reacted cautiously to the Israeli compromise.

"Before we announce our position, we are waiting to know exactly how the issue will be resolved, because at this point the Muslims are themselves divided," said Walid Abu Nassar, who is director of 2000 Jubilee festivities in the Holy Land for the Roman Catholic Church.

Last week, the Vatican representative in the Holy Land, Archbishop Pietro Sambi, warned Israel not to permit construction of the mosque and said Christian leaders could close all the churches in Israel in protest if the government gave in on the issue.

Abu Nassar noted Tuesday that Israel and the church agree the disputed land never belonged to the Waqf, or Islamic trust, and demanded that the government "enforce the law."

"The choice of this spot [to build the mosque] is not suitable, especially since some are calling for construction of a mosque even bigger than the basilica," he told AFP.

A Roman Catholic Church official in Jerusalem, speaking on condition of anonymity, did not, however, rule out a compromise agreement "achieved through harmony and brotherhood and which would respect the holiness of the Basilica."

Guinness launches car challenge

SYDNEY (R) — Dust off the deux chevaux, dig out the atlas, and start saving now. If you keep to the speed limit, you might find yourself in the Guinness Book of Records. The chronicles of the world's most improbable achievements announced on Tuesday a brand new race around the world sure to tempt the well-heeled motorist yearning for a bit of old-fashioned adventure. Eighty cars will leave London's Millennium Dome on Oct. 15 next year for a 68-day odyssey eastwards through at least 25 countries spread over six continents.

Suspect sought in flood scam

BANGKOK (AP) — Con men persuaded thousands of Thai villagers that they could make a killing by selling their land when a flood of biblical magnitude overtook the earth next year, police said Tuesday. Police said the con men convinced 5,771 villagers that many parts of the world will be flooded next year and that foreigners would pay exorbitant prices for their land. Northeast Thailand is an arid plain, frequently suffering drought. The villagers didn't sell their land to the con men, but paid them to act as agents in selling the land to foreigners. "I don't know what has happened to Thai people, they have become so materialistic," said Col. Panya Marnen, the police chief.

Homeless hippo wanders country

BOGOTA (R) — He once lived in the lap of luxury, rubbing shoulders with billionaire drug lords and cavorting in the mud with females of his hairless and short-legged breed. But now nomad, a two-tonne hippopotamus, is homeless. Authorities say he has been wandering the countryside for months since his unceremonious ouster from the place where he'd been living since 1981. Last November, nomad was muscled off the estate by a bigger hippo, apparently tired of having to share its two females with two other males. "He's been wandering from farm to farm ever since," an official said, saying local peasants had complained about nomad's onerous encounters with some farm animals, including cows.

Business angry over web stunt

NEW YORK (R) — Internet users seeing a Citigroup Web site might find more than they were banking on. The international financial services firm filed a lawsuit alleging that a pornographic web site business was wrongfully using its Citibank subsidiary's trademarked name to direct users to X-rated advertisements. The suit was filed on Friday in Manhattan federal court against Seattle-based Internet Entertainment Group, which designs and sells advertising space on "hard core" pornographic sites. Those sites include "clubanytime.com," "clublove.com" and "yourshit.com."

Couple settle legal dispute over 'love'

LONDON (AFP) — A dispute between two former lovers over the cost of their relationship was resolved in an amicable out-of-court exchange Tuesday. William Parker, a chartered surveyor, had been suing Helen Holdsworth for \$32,700 which he said he had spent on her during their affair. He drew up an itemised bill to back up his claim, including 11 pounds for cigarettes and 1.75 pounds for a door bolt. Parker, 51, insisted Holdsworth, 38, had agreed she would repay him when her financial situation had improved, rather than accept the items as tokens of love. But a court in southwest London hearing the case was told Tuesday that the pair had reached a "clean break" settlement. She agreed to pay him 10,000 pounds and he agreed to give her his VW Golf car.